CRASH

ZX SPECTRUM

No.13 FEBRUARY 1985

85p

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CRASH

MICRO GAMES ACTION

ISSUE 13 FEBRUARY 1985

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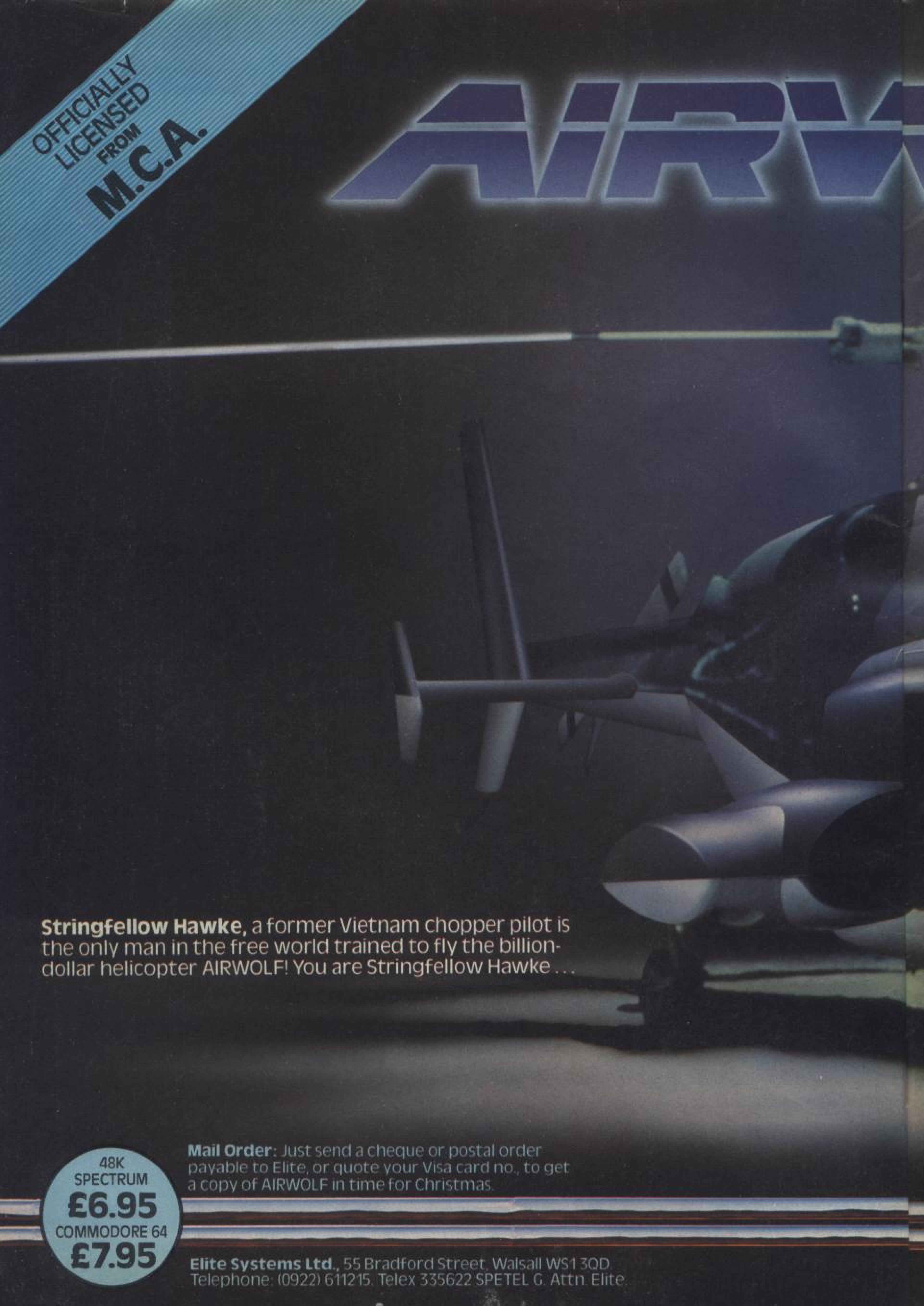
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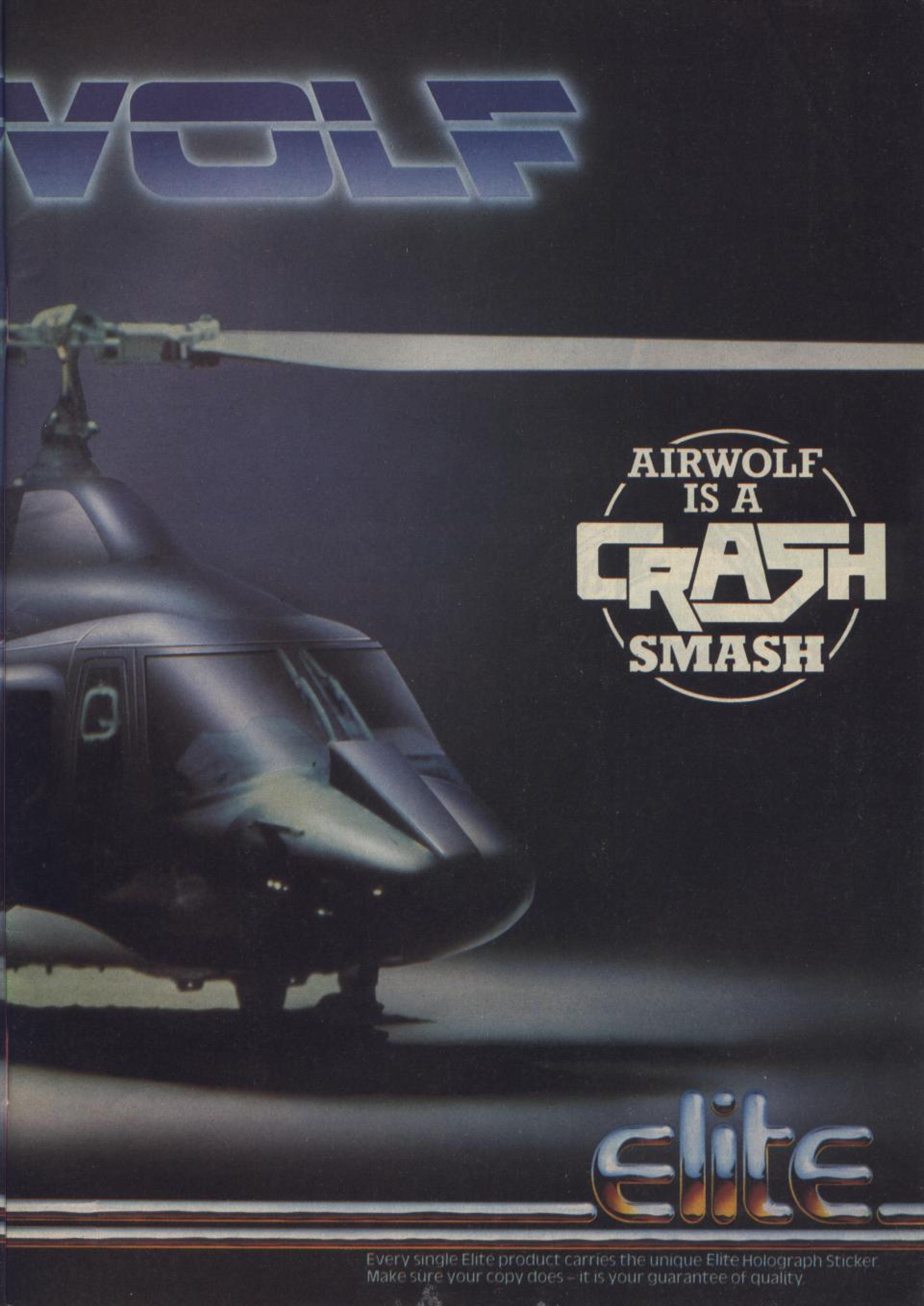
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CRASH

MICRO GAMES ACTION

BIG BUSINESS LITTLE BUSINESS

IT WAS a Christmas full of surprises. Good for some, bad for others. Against expectations it was once again a Sinclair Christmas. Software houses who had gambled on bigger CBM 64 software sales and allowed their Spectrum software catalogue to dwindle to second place had rather a shock.

With a third Christmas in the market place, great emphasis was placed on grandiose packaging and slick, professional marketing hype. In many cases reliance was put on a game's association with a TV or film original in the sadly mistaken belief that a good (or even bad but well liked) TV programme would sell a games program no matter what the game was like. There were some pleasant exceptions, but some companies who should have known better and thought better of their public, came a cropper. And the spectacular failure of *The Great Space Race* to deliver anything new, intriguing or even downright good, goes to show that this business needs more than overblown hype and big boxes.

So hardly a Christmas of very good cheer for some of the bigger companies. And do I hear the rumbles, once again, that the balloon has burst? Well, any software house that thinks so, should probably get the old skate board out of the cupboard, dust it off and zoom off into the sunset. It'll be a pity if they do, because they won't notice just how well some people have done, who have employed a little genius, a lot of hard work and borne in mind that their public doesn't consist of mindless idiots.

A startling Christmas success was (and still is) Realtime's *Starstrike* — not a lot of hype there. Another was (and still is) Gargoyle Games' *Tir Na Nog* — again, not a lot of hype either. And looking to some of the biggies, success abounds — *Doomdark's Revenge, Knight Lore, Avalon, Hunchback 2, Backpackers Guide* and so on. The list is much longer.

No, when you come down to it, the games software market is here to stay, and it is showing a parallel with the music industry in as much as it is the continual new blood that comes up with the exciting new ideas. And who would want it otherwise?

THE NOVEL GAME

Reflecting on a piece of PR that recently came through from Hutchinson Computer Publishing Company Ltd (an offshoot of the renowned book publishers), I came to the conclusion that adventure and strategy games are beginning, very properly, to merge with written novels. The PR was about *THE FOURTH PROTOCOL — The Game*, adapted from best-selling author Frederick Forsyth's most recent novel. It caught my eye because I had just that day finished reading *The Fourth Protocol*, a book which received some mixed reviews but has sold outstandingly well, and which I thoroughly enjoyed (its politics are not a part of this mention)!

In trying to explain to sceptics who still consider computer games to be a passing phase of very little merit, I have resorted to attempting to put across the value and sophistication of adventure games along these lines: An adventure game is like a novel. It can be well or badly written and the plot can be hogwash or it can be excellent, just like a novel. But the difference is that the player interacts with the characters on the screen and alters the way the plot unfolds — ergo, in some ways an adventure game is better than a novel because it involves the player/reader far more and provokes an intelligent response.

The sceptic usually remains unconvinced of course, and it's often better to stop talking and make them play a game. But the fact remains that fiction, traditionally book-based, is branching out. Author John Fowles allowed the reader to make up his own mind as to which of the alternative endings he preferred in the novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* — a sort of literary precursor to books like Steve Jackson and Ian Livingstone's *Fighting Fantasy Series*, many of which are now naturally turning into adventure games on the computer. In a sense, writers like Fowles have helped to alter the belief that a writer writes and a reader reads what is written, like it or not. A good novelist, of course, has always left a lot to the reader's imagination; now there is a hint that writers are going to allow readers more of a hand in the creation of a novel and its contents. The computer adventure game has helped create an entirely new environment where the creator's job is to provide a plausible scenario, a fictional but realistic population and then let the reader/player get on with the job of reacting to it all.

Looking at Hutchinson's piece of PR about the *The Fourth Protocol*, I wondered how much longer it would be before a best-selling computer game is sold to a book publisher to be also released as a novel. It largely depends, I would assume, on whether writers like Mr. Forsyth awake to the flexible thrills of composing literature for the computer. Perhaps the natural thing will remain to write a fixed plot as a book and then have it converted to computer data where at every stage (which was fixed by the author in the novel) the outcome can be altered by circumstances and the player's attitudes and abilities, but I think it might prove to be a very thin line, and that soon we shall see some writers working from the computer to the book rather than the other way around.

The Fourth Protocol — The Game has been developed by games designers John Lambshead and Gordon Patterson and programmed by the Electronic Pencil Company, and should be due for release in the late Spring.

RYALLED AGAIN



Attempting to pick up the remnants of the once-powerful CRASH empire which with one mighty blow of his pen (more powerful than the sword) Front Line columnist Angus Ryall has shattered into gin-soaked pieces, I talked on the phone the other day to John Merry of Scorpio Gamesworld, who feels he has come in for some unfair stick from the Front Line Sandinista. John feels that Angus's last piece (in the Christmas special) implies that Scorpio Gamesworld were withdrawing advertising from CRASH because of an unfavourable review, thus putting pressure on us to improve it, whereas John's statement strictly referred to previously made and unfair personal comments about himself. In any case, as John Merry correctly points out, Scorpio Gamesworld have not yet advertised in CRASH and have never made any bookings to do so. The big question now for 85 is will they ever want to again? Over to you Angus. . . .

Well not quite, while we're

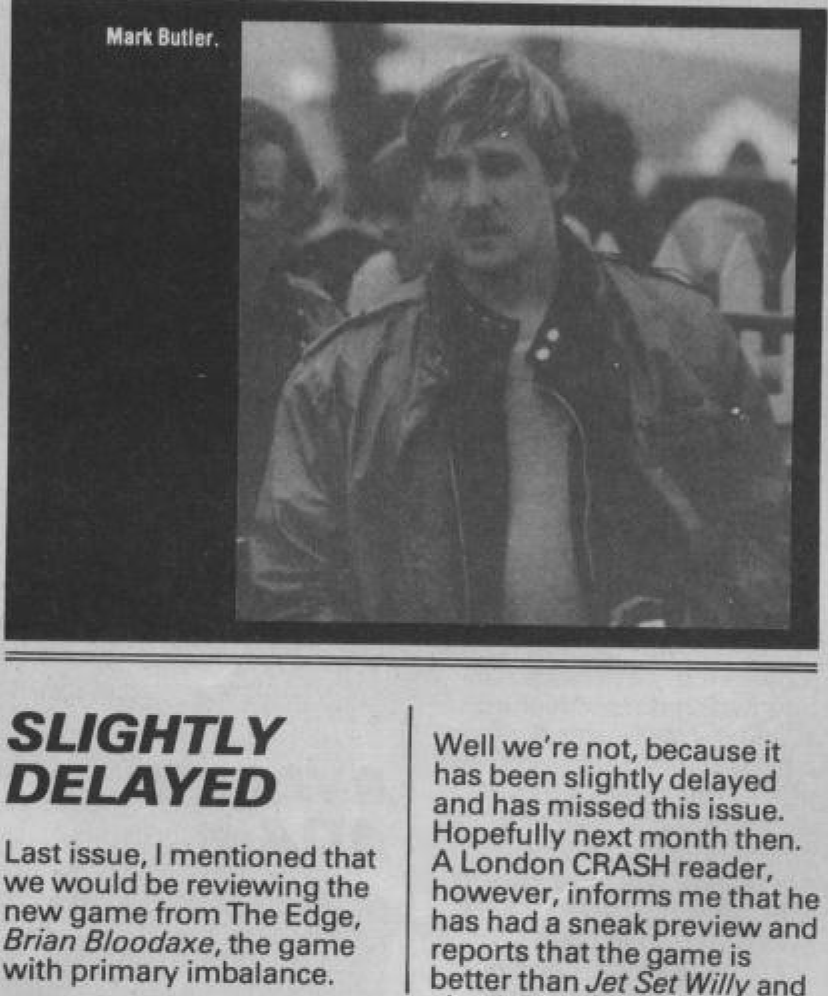
on the subject, John Gilbert from *Sinclair User* rang a few minutes later to remark that whilst he attended the Cambridge Awards presentation, he made no speech, vacuous or otherwise, although Bill Scolding did, but no one can remember Bill making any remarks about the magazine he works for, brilliant or otherwise, and further, it is *Sinclair User* and not Sinclair Research who sponsor the competition with C.C.S. Still, as Angus pointed out in the article, there had been a lot of gin flowing. . . .

CRASH ON TELLY

I hope a lot of Central Television viewers were watching Central's News programme on Wednesday 19th December, as the last item was about CRASH magazine and its young team of reviewers. CTV News were intrigued at the idea of a national computer magazine being produced in 'the ancient market town of Ludlow'. I got to say a little piece myself (about what a brilliant magazine I work for — yes, it was bit vacuous I admit), but star of the four minute item was undoubtedly shy and retiring head reviewer Matthew Uffindell, who's calmly authoritative Shropshire accent must have put the fear of God up some software houses when they think of him looking at their games. Programs featured briefly in the news item were Ocean's *Hunchback 2*, Ultimate's *Knight Lore*, Elite's *Airwolf* and Realtime's *Starstrike*. For any viewer wondering how we made the Spectrum sound like an arcade machine, it was the specially modified Uffindell tranny that did it.

YOU CAN'T TEACH AN OLD DOG. . . .

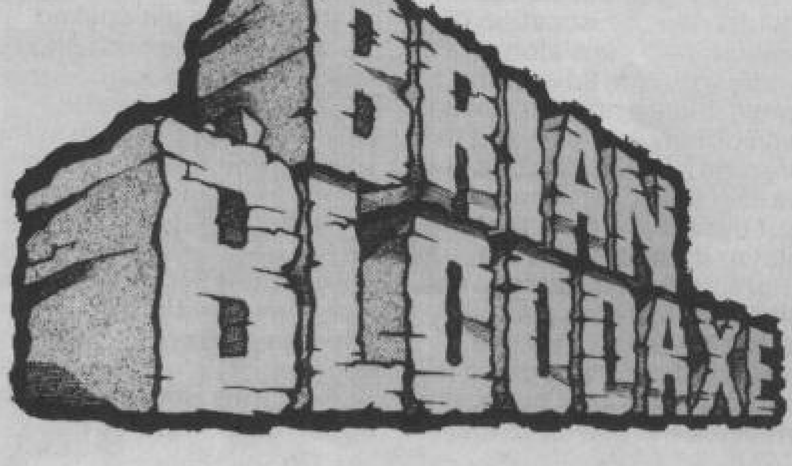
My article on Imagine in the Christmas Special certainly stirred up a hornets nest of comment, much of it from the city of Liverpool, and ripples are still spreading outwards as I write. But one ex-Imagine director is up to his old tricks again. We were rather startled to receive a telephone call from Mark Butler, now a director of the software company Thor (*Jack and the Beanstalk*), to say that they would not be paying for their advert in the Christmas issue. He added that there was no point phoning him back as he didn't want to talk to anyone and that was that. To be fair, another director of Thor when contacted, seemed a bit surprised at Butler's call but pointed out that the ad was badly placed on a left-hand page, when it is their policy to book only right-hand pages. Our paperwork, confirmations of which they were sent, shows that no special conditions were placed on the booking. Considering how much advertising Imagine placed with computer magazines and never paid for over many, many months, it just goes to show that you can't teach an old dog new tricks — like behaving decently for instance.


Mark Butler.

SLIGHTLY DELAYED

Last issue, I mentioned that we would be reviewing the new game from The Edge, *Brian Bloodaxe*, the game with primary imbalance.

Well we're not, because it has been slightly delayed and has missed this issue. Hopefully next month then. A London CRASH reader, however, informs me that he has had a sneak preview and reports that the game is better than *Jet Set Willy* and absolutely stuffed full of primary imbalance!



THE THREAT OF TAX

WITH THE SPRING BUDGET this year, the Tory government is fully expected to introduce a VAT rate of 15% on newspapers and magazines. At present there is no VAT on periodicals or newspapers. There hans't been any tax on the press in fact since the last tax on newspapers and journals was repealed in 1855.

Estimates on what the government would hope to raise by this tax (somewhere in the region of £360 million) fails to take into account the fact that the tax would be levied on a drastically decreased market and thus bring in much less. According to the advertising trade press journal *Campaign*, the imposition of VAT might cost national newspapers £34, regional papers £27 million and magazines as much as £50 million in lost revenue. Naturally this will mean reduced production, loss of jobs and even the closure of some magazines. If proof of this is needed, the government need only take a look at the fast food industry. In the two years since VAT was introduced on takeaway food (the reason why there was a difference of price at MacDonalds between 'eating in' and taking away') there has been reported a sharply reduced turnover, lost jobs and severely reduced profits — hence a far lower tax than the Treasury expected.

The Newstrade takes the view that sales of periodicals will decline by 9%, recovering in due course to show a 4–5% fall in sales. With a scheduled paper price increase of 8 - 9% in the early spring the loss of revenue will be catastrophic. Profit margins on periodical magazines is not exceptionally high, in fact on sales there is commonly a loss, which is made up by advertising revenue.

We have all to face the fact that there will be some losses of magazines if VAT is introduced, and reduced turnover will severely limit

publishers from developing new product and improving existing titles. YOU the reader will lose out by having less to read and probably having to pay more for the privilege.

But there is a more fundamental threat here. Taxes on the press were repealed because it has been a long--cherished belief of the British that we are a free people, free to express our views. Press censorship is held in horror in this country. But through the imposition of a tax, the government have a subtle stranglehold on the information media. It sets a precedent and is the thin end of the wedge, to be able to put financial pressure on a press it may not like. The introduction of VAT on newspapers and magazines is disastrous and it must be stopped before it is too late. The Periodical Publishers Association have produced an advert which we carry here. Please take it seriously. In addition we have included a cut-out coupon for you to fill in and send to your local MP. **PLEASE USE IT!**

ADVERTISERS' INDEX

GAMES REVIEWED IN THIS ISSUE

DON'T VAT THE PRESS

There are strong reasons to believe the Chancellor of the Exchequer is planning to impose VAT on your magazine.
Such a move would turn the clock back 130 years — the last tax on newspapers and journals was repealed in 1855. Since then 'No tax on knowledge' has been a principle agreed by all Governments, even in the darkest days of war.
A free Press is a tax-free Press.
No Government should be given the power to impose financial pressure on a Press it may not like.
Tell your MP to say 'NO' to any tax on reading.

Issued by the Periodical Publishers Association, London

Please fill in the form below and send it to your Member for Parliament (MP) if you are over 18, or get your parents to fill out the form and send it to their MP if you are under 18.

I have been given strong reasons to believe that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is planning to impose VAT on newspapers and journals.

I have also been given reasons to believe that the imposition of VAT on newspapers and journals will have a seriously damaging effect on the press of this country which may result in losses of jobs and possibly even closures of some titles. Moreover, a press taxed by government is no longer a free press and a cherished British tradition will be undermined.

There should be no tax on knowledge, and to introduce one now will be to turn the clock back 130 years.

I wish my severe opposition to the imposition of VAT on newspapers and journals to go on record, and as my Member for Parliament I ask you on my behalf to say 'NO' to any such tax on reading. Thank you.

Name ....

Address ....

....

Signature ....

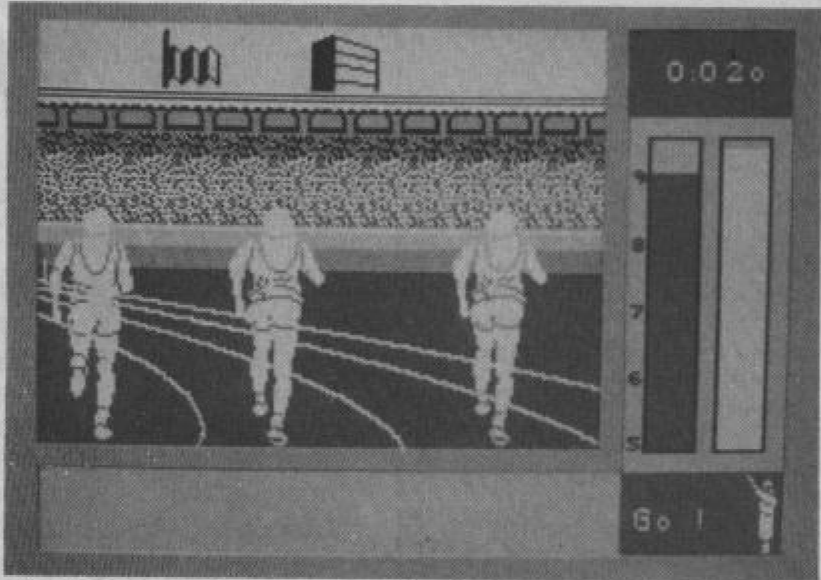
RUN FOR GOLD

Producer: **Hill MacGibbon**
Memory required: **48K**
Retail price: **£9.95**
Language: **machine code**
Author: **Five Ways Software**

Described as the ultimate challenge for middle distance runners, a chance to win the Olympic Gold against the world's top athletes in the 400m, 800m and 1500m, this Hill MacGibbon sports simulation is decidely unsual because it resembles none of the other similar 'Track and Field' type games. The main reason for this is that the display takes a 3D perspective view as you might see in a Road Racer game, that is at ground level, just behind the runners.

The screen shows the red running track marked by the white lines, the green of the surrounding grass and beyond that, the crowded stadium which scrolls along as the runners round the bends at either end. A race starts with the runners taking part at their marks. Once off and going, the action is followed rather as though the player was looking through a camera tracking along immediately behind the runners. You control one runner, the computer controls the others. The similarity to a road racer is heightened in the instructions, which tell you how to 'steer' your runner. On level 1 of play, the runner will always stay centrally in his lane, and you can change lanes by steering him. On level 2 of play you will have to steer him constantly as he will not automatically stay in the lane. A further complication is introduced in as much as the other runners will not try and collide, but as they change lanes for advantage a collision is possible, in which case you may fall over, or be awarded a foul.

There is an element of strategy since a pacemaker may well be in the race, and he should be well watched. Throughout the race the two columns on the right record your runner's pace in metres per second and his energy level. You will be disqualified for making 2 false starts in



The Olympic running program with a difference. RUN FOR GOLD's unusual 3D graphics are seen to good advantage in this screen shot.

the same race, steering off the track, moving out of your lane in the 400m or moving out of your lane before the 700m mark in the 800m.

CRITICISM

● 'Software houses don't seem to want to let us forget the 84 Olympics yet. Here's another athletics type prog. But wait, it's totally different in style to anything else yet seen. It's a 3D running game, with some impressive, almost life-like runners. There are only three events to attempt, all running, but don't let this make you think that there's not much to the game. You must qualify for better competitions, pace your runner and keep him in his lane. I found the steering quite difficult, but there is an option to eliminate this up to a point. *Run for Gold* is a good simulation, but it could have been a little more addictive (perhaps it would have felt better in the summer)?'

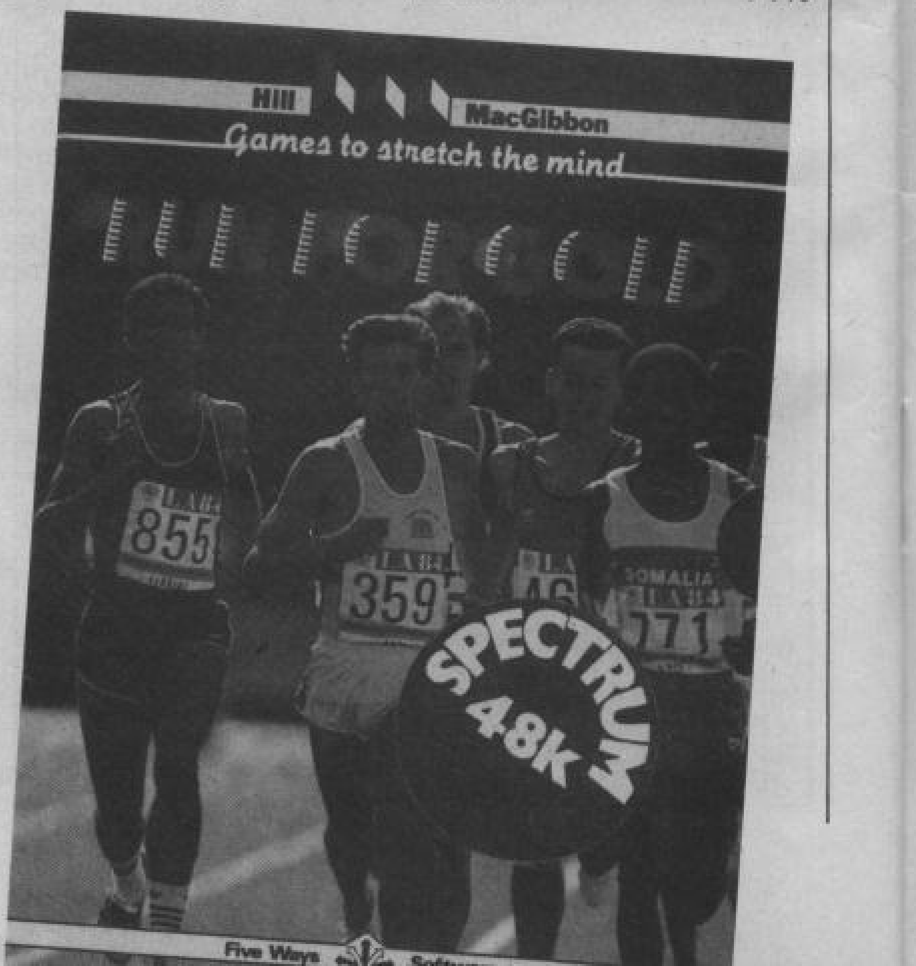
● *'After such a large rush of athletic games and at such a late date, I'm surprised to see another sports game. Late or not this game does qualify as having some of the best animation and large graphics around. Believe me, it's exceptionally detailed in its animation. Not only is there animation, but the animation is in 3D perspective — the first to be done in the sports scene. Of course in comes Catch 22, because the animation is so good and realistic just a few items have been sacrificed, or should I say only one thing has been given. Yes, it's running — there are no other events in this game, just plain old running. This is a pity because with animation like this and a few different events, it would be unbeatable. Another niggle I might add is that because the graphics characters are so large and well animated they move quite slowly. It's a shame that Hill MacGibbon could not have added a few more features to this game which, together with the great graphics would sell the game. Unfortunately, as it stands, and at such a high price, it will not see the light of day for many sports games players.'*

● 'This definitely has to be the most realistic looking running game ever for the Spectrum, and probably for any computer yet. The graphics are huge, beautifully animated, and the background effect works very well. The pace at which they move is rather slow however, and gives the impression of watching a slowed down action replay. Unlike all the other 'Track and Field' type games, *Run for Gold* does not require the ultimate destruction of either keyboard or joystick, and is much more a game of judgement and skill. It is rather steeply priced, though, which may not appeal to many who would otherwise love it.'

COMMENTS

Control keys: O/N increase/decrease pace, I/P left/right, Q to start
Joystick: Sinclair 2, Kempston
Keyboard play: quite responsive
Use of colour: sensible, with few attribute problems
Graphics: excellent, with very effective 3D
Sound: not much, just beeps for footsteps
Skill levels: 2
Lives: N/A
Screens: scrolling
General rating: an excellent simulation, limited in scope and a bit pricey.

Use of computer	78%
Graphics	81%
Playability	70%
Getting started	85%
Addictive qualities	55%
Value for money	55%
Overall	**71%**

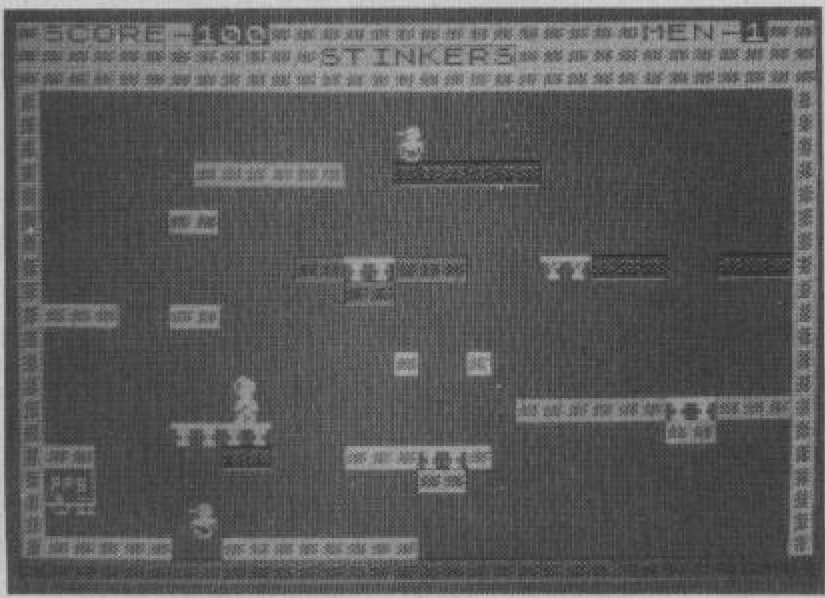


SHUTTLE SHOCK

Producer: **Software Super Savers**
Memory required: **48K**
Retail price: **£2.99**
Language: **machine code**
Author: **Rob Povey**

Here we have another of Software Projects' budget games under their Software Super Savers brand name. *Shuttle Shock* is a platform game with an undeniably MM-cum-JSW-left-overs feeling to it. You play the part of a shuttle pilot in your space suit, suffering from a galactic form of jet lag — shuttle shock. Disorientation has separated you from your battery charger andthe idea is to reach it once on every screen. The platforms include solid ones, ones that sink and act as lifts downwards and ones that slide sideways. To climb levels you have a teleport button that causes you to dematerialise and then rematerialise on the desired platform. Each screen is armed with varying monsters that move about on pre-determined paths and make life difficult.

Half the point to the game is to discover the best route round to get to your charger and learn the timing routines required to achieve this without getting killed off. Teleporting just as a nasty comes up is no good, since you can be killed if even the merest hint of your tail is left behind.



A cruel joke on Imagine in the room named STINKERS.

CRITICISM

● 'The direction and teleport buttons are in very good positions. The continuous music is just a funny little tune that repeats itself. The game itself involves judgement of heights andangles to ensure a correct teleportation, as well as close timing to avoid the different types of nasty. I liked the graphics, which are neat and amusing, but overall,only a fair game.'

● *'The style and animation of the moving characters in this game is very reminiscent of* Manic Miner. *Not that this is anything like as good a game, either in content or colour, but one wonders whether the hand of M. Smith Esq. had anything to do with it! With each screen completed, the next is a little harder in layout and timing, which makes* Shuttle Shock *a reasonable game for its price, even reasonable fun without being a monster hit.'*

● 'One of the touches in this cute game that reminds me inevitably of *Manic Miner* or *Jet Set Willy* is the use of a name for each room along the lines of Minter's Mowers or a reference to the old and defunct enemy, Imagine with Stinkers (remember *Stonkers*)? The smallish graphics are fairly detailed and move well, although there are a few bugs in the program when bits and pieces of graphics aren't always neatly cleared away! On the whole, quite playable and not bad for the price.'

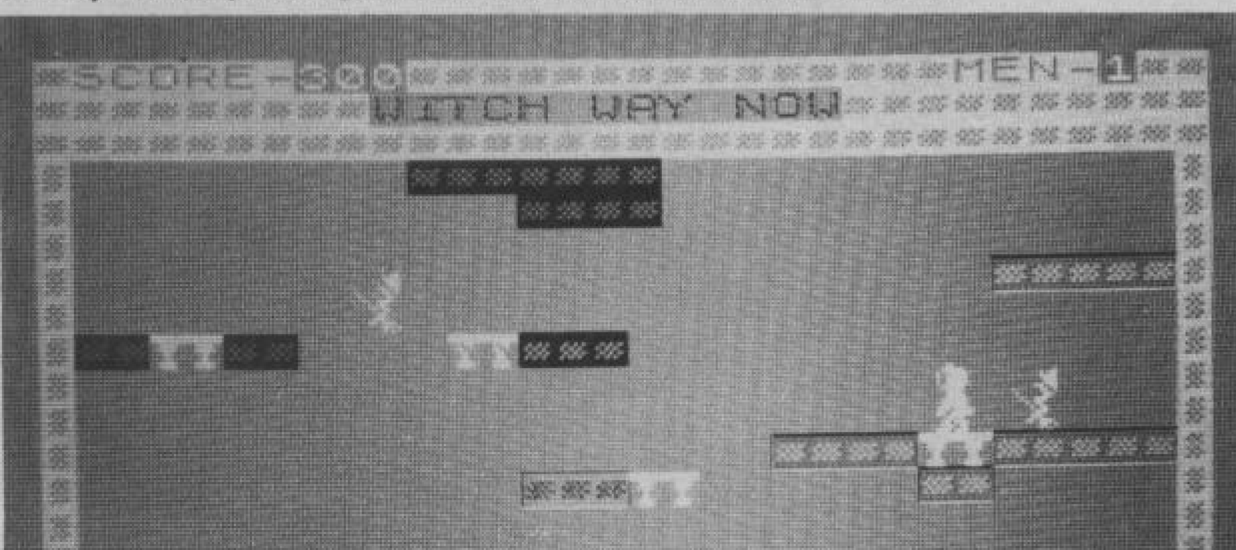
COMMENTS

Control keys: CAPS/Z left/right, BREAK to teleport, M music on/off toggle
Joystick: none
Keyboard play: responsive and very simple
Use of colour: varies well, but overall not very colourful
Graphics: smallish, reasonably animated
Sound: continuous music with on/off facility
Skill levels: 1
Lives: 3
Screens: several
General rating: an average game, quite playable, at a below average price.

Use of computer	60%
Graphics	**69%**
Playability	63%
Getting started	52%
Addictive qualities	63%
Value for money	66%
Overall	**62%**



Shuttle pilot meets platform game in the sub JSW budget game SHUTTLE SHOCK.



Travel with...

Trashman

Now Trashman is a great British success he's ready for international stardom – and you can help him on his way around the world. Our hero has the tall order task of cleaning up every major litter spot around the globe. Scooping up flowers thrown into the bull ring by matador fans in Spain, collecting the tissues of the faithful as they sob by Jerusalem's Wailing Wall, picking up coconuts from a palm beach in Samoa and collecting the empties at the German beer festival (Trashman still likes his tipple!) are just some of the challenges that make up Trashman's task.

Of course, your skill can help our hilarious hero to complete the necessary litter collection at every location, so he can earn the money to fly on to the next country in his round the world quest. And as he visits every continent on Earth in search of rubbish you can share every fun filled, thrill packed second with him.

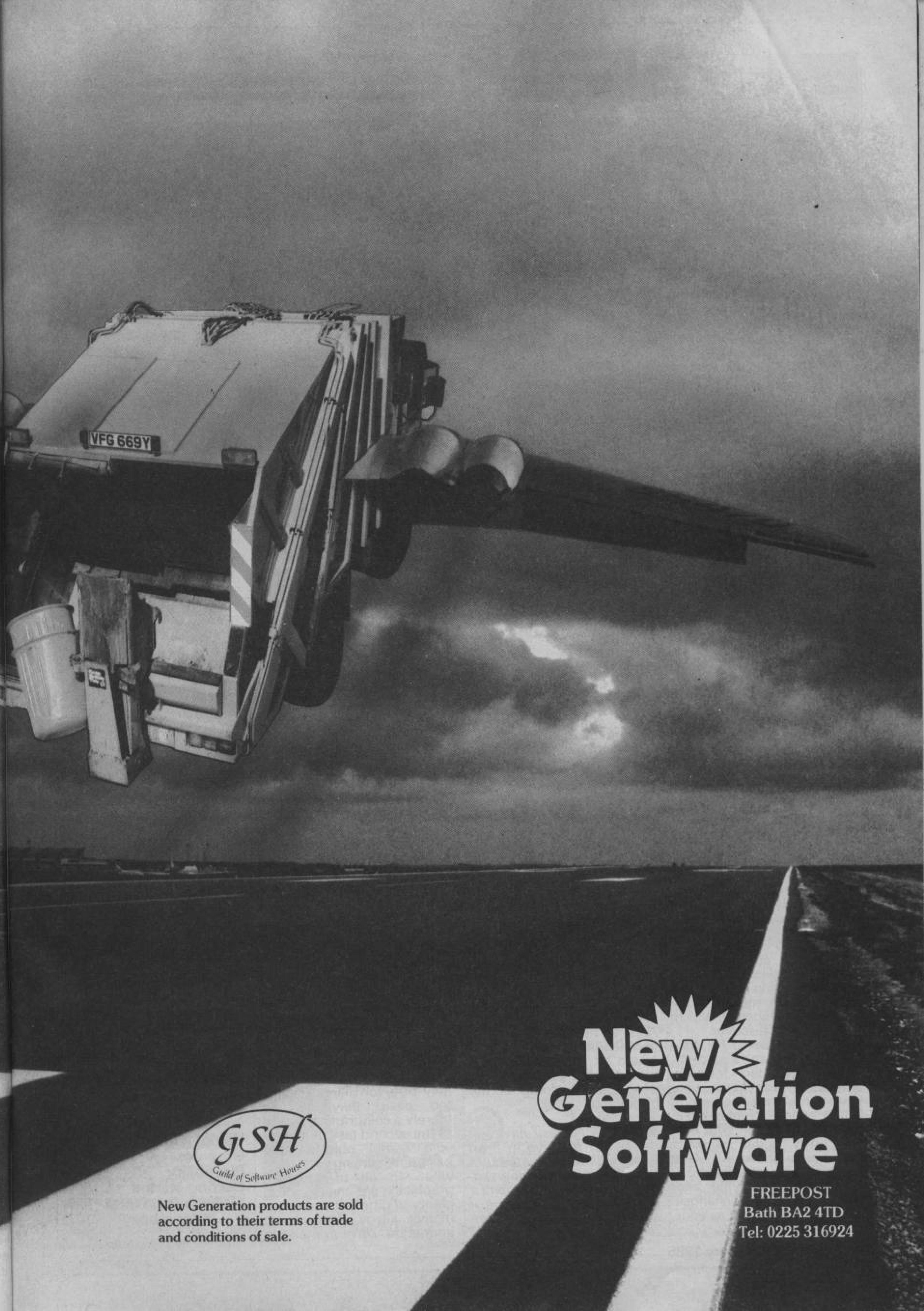
Travel with Trashman has one or two player scoring, Hall of Fame and is compatible with Kempston, Sinclair Interface 2, Protek or equivalent joysticks. Available for the 48K Spectrum today from most good computer stores for just **£5.95.**

TRAVEL WITH TRASHMAN. AUTHOR – MALCOLM EVANS

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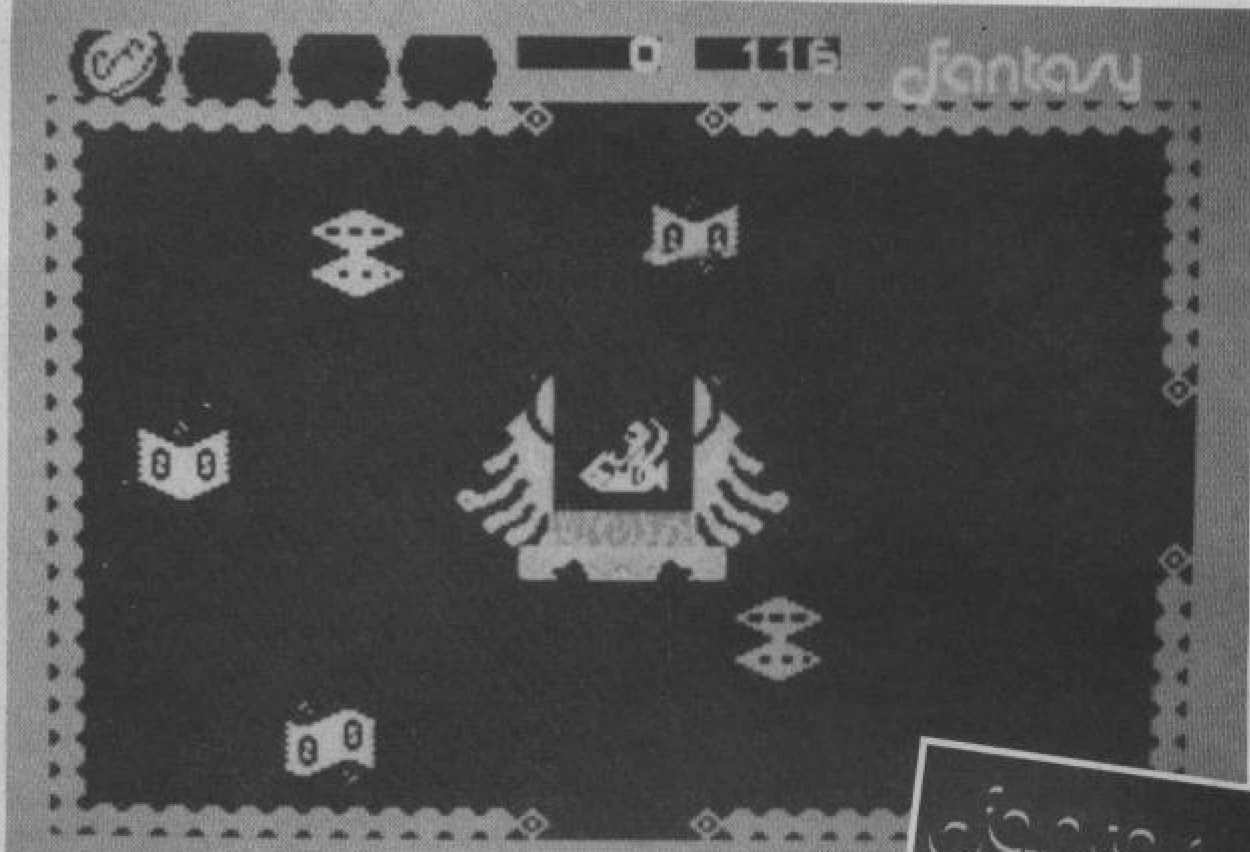
THE DRIVE IN

Producer: **Fantasy Software**
Memory required: **48K**
Retail price: **£5.50**
Language: **machine code**
Author: **Dave Harper**

While you are struggling to save the universe from the infinitely evil Scarthax, spare a thought for Ziggy's daring friend, the infinitely beautiful Dezzy, who's dashing to aid her super hero comrade when she runs into a dreadful space storm and is thrown into a part of space she doesn't know well. The space ship is damaged, and seeking somewhere safe to repair it, finds herself heading for a supposedly deserted old Drive In planetoid in a disused asteroid mining belt. To her surprise the Drive In is flashing its neon welcoming signs. She enters and the doors slam shut! Dezzy has entered Scarthax's trap!

Your task is to help Dezzy escape. Within the Drive In is a maze of rooms inhabited by 28 different types of alien. Dezzy can escape by assembling an old intergalactic spaceship, parts of which may be found within the 189 rooms. Energy is in short supply, and you must find ways of replenishing it. Some rooms contain automatic garages, swap shops, banks and time machines. There are also useful objects to be collected, four being allowed at a time. Some of these will let you do different things and aid in your task, some will be useful to swap for energy. Some rooms need keys to enter and exit, others are controlled by traffic lights. The discovered parts of the ship must be reassembled in room 189 in the correct sequence, which you must also discover.

Points are scored for destroying aliens, and a percentage is awarded for the amount of the game you have completed. Each room in the game is represented by a single screen with exit and entry points marked. Four boxes above the playing area are used to show what you are carrying, and the Fantasy logo changes colour progressively as your energy runs down.



Ziggy's bestest friend Dezzy comes to the rescue, and finds herself trapped in the DRIVE-IN.



CRITICISM

● 'I don't think Fantasy are too pleased with this game as until now I've not seen any adverts for it. When I first played *Drive In* it didn't really appeal to me, but now I've found with much more play that I enjoy it. It actually plays like a lot of other Fantasy games except that around the rooms (most of which are easily accessible) there is a time machine that looks like a clock and which gives you, in effect, extra lives by giving you back all your power (in return for some points loss). There is a distinct lack of aliens (only 28 different types!) even though they clutter up the rooms making it difficult to get from one side to the other without losing power. There is also a shelter provided in some of the more crowded rooms where you can hide from the aliens until the lights change. All in all I found playing this game quite pleasant but it was a bit hard to grasp the idea of what you were supposed to be doing at the beginning.'

● *'I think Fantasy have left the object of* Drive In *a bit obscure, letting you find out many things for yourself, which in many games isn't a bad point, but in this game, it seems to me, to be its downfall. The reasoning behind this is that it is very difficult to work out what several objects are capable of doing. The game itself is more of an intensive shoot em up than anything else. This will appeal to many people, although I think the strategy in programming just shoot em up games is not developing enough, people require more thought and drive, and here actually shooting down aliens is really a very simple task, unlike the same task in, say,* Doomsday Castle *. I became bored quickly with this game because I didn't seem to be getting anywhere with it, which is a shame, because the graphics are large and very nicely animated. Perhaps people demand more than just unskilful shoot em ups these days.'*

● *'Drive In* has split itself into two distinct games, an alien zapper and a maze/strategy game. It would be easy to say that *Drive In* probably has the action that maybe *Backpackers* slightly lacks, but it wouldn't be entirely true, for killing aliens is too easy, they become merely a colourful hindrance to the second task of identifying useful objects, ship parts and learning what does what. In all of this the graphics are very nice, plenty of different and imaginative aliens, and lots of animation. *Drive In* makes a good, lightweight game which will probably appeal to many, but in the end it isn't all that addictive.'

COMMENTS

Control keys: user definable, four direction and fire, plus keys 1 to 4 for pick up/drop
Joystick: Kempston, Sinclair 2, Protek, AGF
Keyboard play: responsive
Use of colour: good
Graphics: very good, varied and imaginative
Sound: average
Skill levels: 1
Lives: 1
Screens: 189
General rating: above average

Use of computer	82%
Graphics	77%
Playability	65%
Getting started	69%
Addictive qualities	58%
Value for money	70%
Overall	**70%**







As Technician Ted you clock in for work at the strangest factory – even getting in can be a problem! You have a number of important tasks to perform, but most days there just don't seem to be enough hours in the day to get all your work completed.

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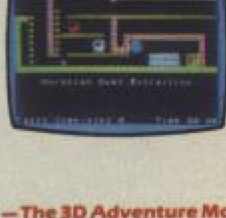
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TECHNICIAN TED

Producer: **Hewson Consultants**
Memory required: **48K**
Retail price: **£5.95**
Language: **machine code**
Author: **Steve Marsden & Dave Cooke**

Hewson Consultants have generally steered clear of the more normal type of arcade game, so it comes as something of a surprise to see *Technician Ted* which is very much an arcade platform game. With their recent history, however, it is no surprise to see that Hewsons have waited until they got their hands on a real strong contender. This is the first ever program from the duo of Steve Marsden and Dave Cooke, who have set their game in the environment they know best, the silicon chip factory.

Technician Ted has to walk around a very large plant collecting chips, while avoiding the numerous hazards. It would be hard not to compare this new game with *Manic Miner*, which on the surface it resembles. Indeed, there are even sly references in some of the room names. But once into the game it soon becomes apparent that *Technician Ted* isn't quite so MMish as one might expect.

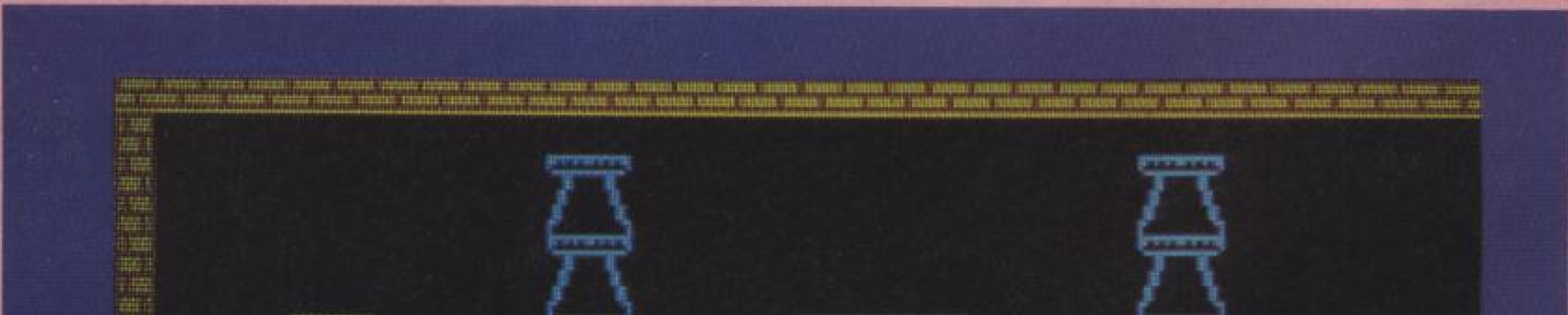
For a start off, the chips cannot all be reached, some rooms are impossible to get into, and others contain routes between hazards that look impossible — and are! But the secret lies in how you go about playing the game, and gradually all becomes clearer. There are several levels to the factory, and as in *Pyjamarama* a lift room allows access to other floors, although holes in the floors and ceilings also link between screens.

An unusual idea is that there are no lives as such but a long purple bar slowly recedes across the screen as you lose a life. As a result you may have between 30 odd and zero lives. Once down to zero the scene cuts to the exterior of the chip factory where Ted gets the boot, literally, from the boss. Scoring is by tasks completed and time, set against a real time clock.

CRITICISM

● 'It seems to be a reasonable length of time since a *Manic Miner* style game has been revamped. *Technician Ted* has many similar qualities to *MM* but has been expanded to a large extent with quite a bit more content having been added. Considerable thought must have gone into this program and is definitely not a copy in any sense of the previous success, *Manic Miner*. You, a lively two character-high sprite graphic, seem to be eager to explore the vast extent of thoughtful, tricky and insensitive maze of hazards (insensitive being, they don't give a damn)! There have been previous games such as this with many hazards, nice detailed graphics at a good pace, but none have gone quite into such a depth as this, the depth being that there is only one set way and only one correct way of completing the task. And if you're not going the right way about it, then the solution to the sub-tasks will not even become apparent. This game has some of the liveliest, detailed and imaginative graphics that I've seen to date. Each graphic obstacle has its own characteristics, which makes the game very interesting. Another thing about the game which is quite inspiring is the fact that when a task is done, certain and

Fish and Micro-chips please



varied things happen over the maze — obstacles which you may have thought impossible to overcome become physically possible. An interesting and unique feature of this game. This is one game that I can quite easily and willingly state that it must be a game to add to your collection. Truly amazing, truly difficult, truly wonderful.'

● 'Technician Ted *bears a strong resemblance to both* Jet Set Willy *and* Manic Miner, *but the major difference between this and other platform games is that this game needs a lot more thought to complete the screens. The graphics are well up to Hewson's usual standard, and certainly surpass those seen in* JSW *and* MM. *The sound in this game is pretty good too, playing a continuous tune throughout the game (and a different one in the attract mode).* Technician Ted *is fun to play, offering progressive difficulty in the screens, so every screen is a new challenge to be tackled and overcome. If you become a bit bored with* ye olde *platform type games this one is certainly worth getting because it offers a real challenge which seems to be lacking in many of today's platform games. Overall, as a platform game* Technician Ted *must go down as one of the best games available for the Spectrum and brings back life to the genre which of late have just been copies of* Manic Miner. *And it is a more original game of the type than any of its predecessors.'*

● 'The excitement starts straight away with the highly unusual loader, which not only masks the border but also while it is loading there are ranks of Technician Teds marching up and down the screen at the same time. And that's not all, for the first time ever, a countdown clock to completion of loading. AND, going in the opposite direction of most others these days, the loading rate is slightly SLOWER than normal, thus hopefully ensuring a high rate of loading success. Once loaded, the music breaks out into its full glory (well as much glory as the Spectrum allows), and it is the best since *Manic Miner*, with two tunes played with a 'real' synthesised sound (and equipped with on/off facility if you go mad). The graphics are really wonderful, loads of detail, animation and humour, and the timing routines throughout are perfect, and perfectly hard to beat too. *Technician Ted* is a platform game, and there's nothing new in that, but the thought that has gone into this one makes it quite something else. Addictive, delightful to play and a definite must.'

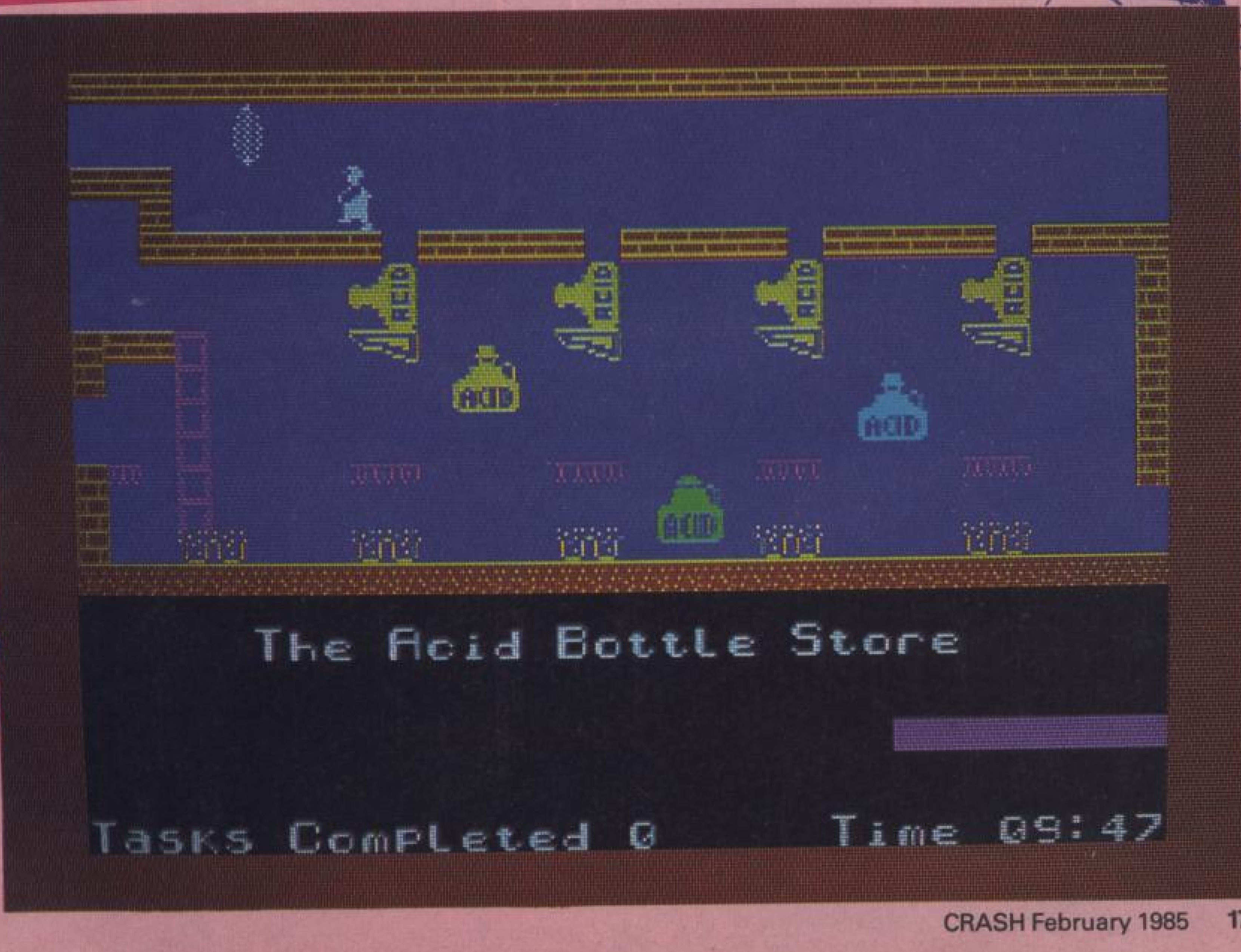
COMMENTS

Control keys: Q and O/W and P left/right, bottom row to jump
Joystick: doesn't need one
Keyboard play: simplicity itself, very responsive
Use of colour: excellent
Graphics: excellent
Sound: excellent
Skill levels: difficult to start, gets progressively worse
Lives: as many as 32, but they go quickly enough
Screens: about 50
General rating: excellent, and great value for money.

Use of computer	93%
Graphics	96%
Playability	96%
Getting started	92%
Addictive qualities	97%
Value for money	99%
Overall	**96%**



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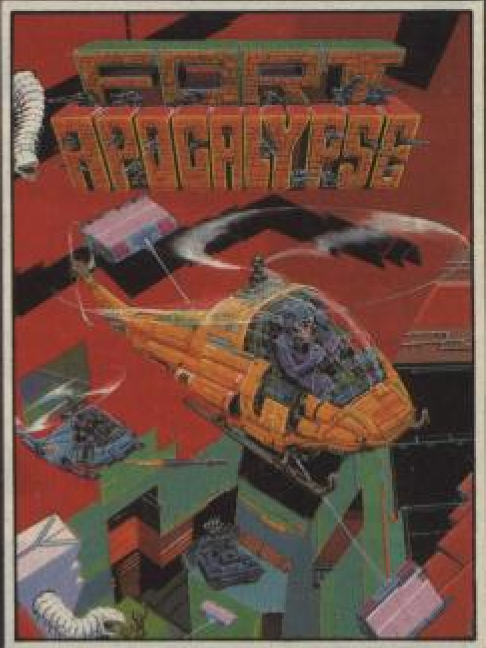
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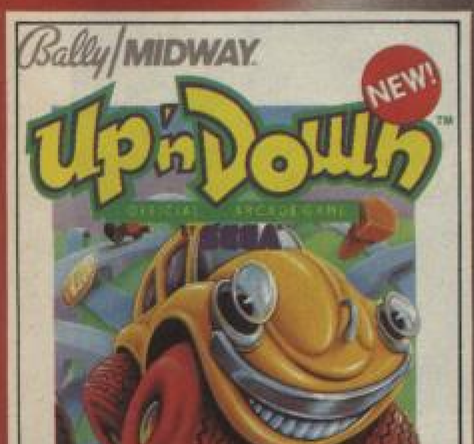
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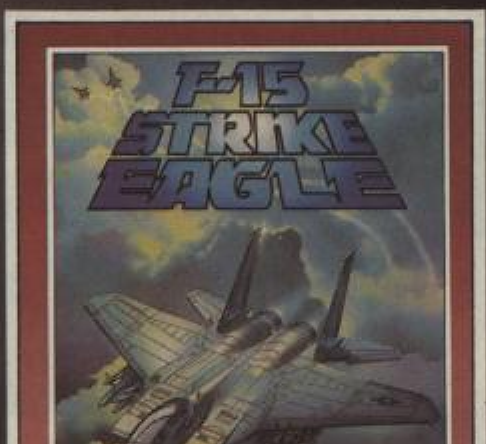
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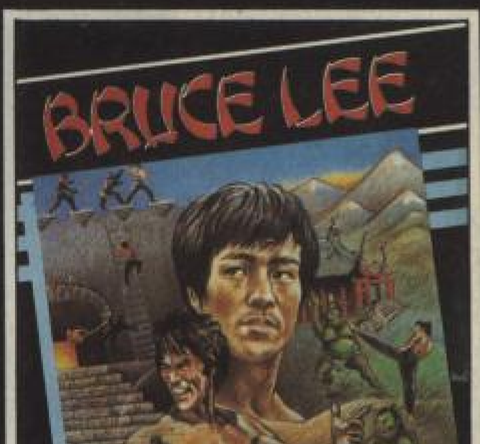
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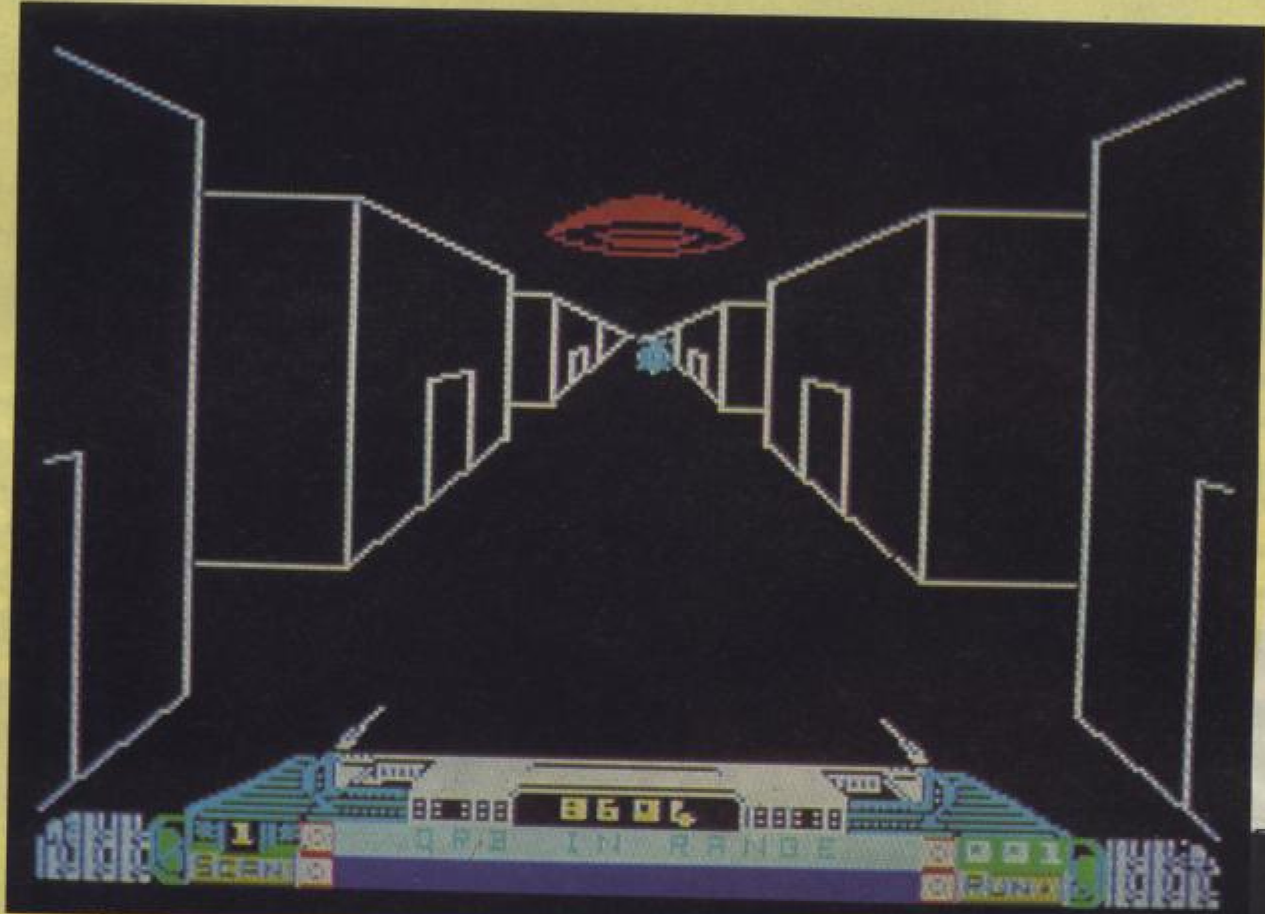
BUGGY BLAST

Producer: **Firebird**
Memory required: **48K**
Retail price: **£5.95**
Language: **machine code**
Author: **P. Hibbard & D. Lowe**

Buggy Blast is the first of Firebird's Gold Edition games, which explains the higher price. *Buggy Blast* is a 3D space shoot em up of some complexity. The story goes like this: For over three centuries the planet Endra has been inhabited by the Lurgons. The key to their power is held in the Central Lurgon Corridor (Sector 8 of the game). A pilot skilled enough to gain entry to this sector and destroy 20 Lurgons will cause a power reversal that will consume the whole complex. You start, seated in your space buggy, in the impressively complex launch tube of the Mother Ship. A vidscreen lowers before your canopy and informs you of the imminent launch and the sector of corridor you will be entering. The scoring system only allows you access to the sector for which you are currently fitted and all launch procedures are fully automatic. The launch fires you down the tube and out into space, then lowers you into the 3D corridor of sector 1. The fight is on!

Buggy instrumentation includes space scanners to warn of mine jammers (see below), onboard computer damage status reports, life mode indicator, Xion phaser indicator lights and an energy counter. Your enemy, the Lurgons, have developed from defective robots and are dedicated to the task of destroying all life forms. They have developed ten sophisticated weapons systems which you will encounter singly or severally depending on the sector being penetrated. These appear in increasing numbers in the narrow corridor, firing at you and wearing down your force field. The twin lasers are aimed with the left/right up/down keys, the buggy always travelling centrally down the corridor.

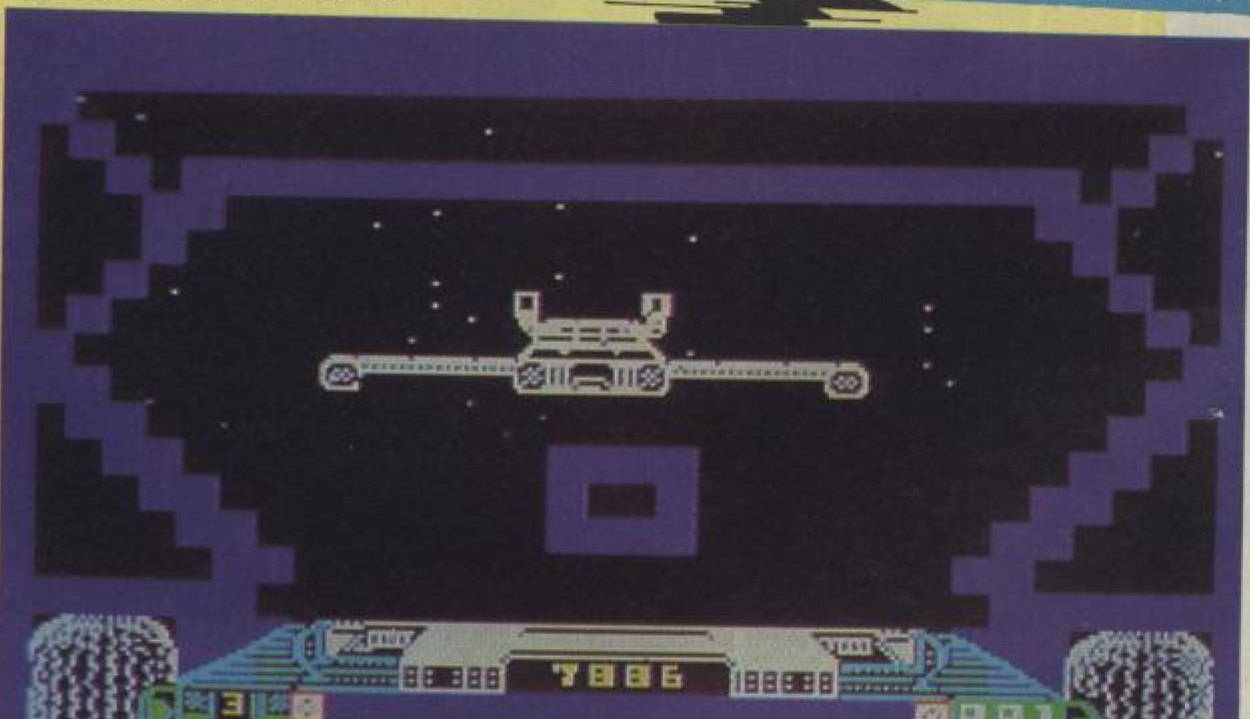
A wary eye must be kept on the energy level, for when it is depleted a return to the



'The fight is on' in sector one



Preparing to dock with the Mother Ship



Mother Ship is essential. This takes you back into space whereupon the Mother Ship appears in the view screen which is equipped with a docking sight. This must be lined up on the central docking tube of the Mother Ship. It is at this point that the mine jammers try and destroy you. Successfully destroying a mine jammer will bring the Mother Ship back into range for auto-docking. At this point the score is updated which determines whether you will be returned to sector 1 or sent on to the next level. Naturally enough, life gets harder with each level/sector!

CRITICISM

● '*Buggy Blast*, is a Firebird Gold Edition, so I was expecting it to be a bit on the good side. The scenario is not very new, it's the robots dedicated to organic life form destruction one. I wonder if they realise that they would have a pretty boring existence if the task was ever completed? Anyway, it won't because us mega-Spectrum owners will zap em all first — that is if there was a Kempston facility. Reverting to the keyboard I found my hands a blur of acivity, trying to survive in the corridors. The game was really exciting and fast moving with audio-visuals to match. I strongly recommend *Buggy Blast* to arcaders with hyper-fast reactions — no one else need apply here. Okay you Lurgons, just wait until I get back to the keys!'

● *'It's about time someone came out with a good, fast shoot em up — I do miss them. This game will provide many hours of mindless blasting and zapping. This is what I call fun! I really must say that this game is so highly polished in 3D graphic detail. All the enemy are drawn solidly and smoothly get larger as they move towards you. Most shoot em up games don't have a very strong objective to them, but this one has a definite objective, a goal to go towards, it doesn't just get harder and harder and harder like Space Invaders used to, although I'm not saying it's easy by any standards. Explosions must be some of the best around, very zappy, very neat. Sound also is incredibly good for a one chanel sound chip, and not a very capable one at that — excellent. It must be among the noisiest shoot em up games ever produced. I have no quibbles with this game whatsoever, and I'm sure it will satisfy anyone who loves pure shoot em up type games. Well worth the money.'*

● '*Buggy Blast* is a visually elegant game with its movie-like opening and between sequences. There really is quite a lot to see and do, as the Lurgon enemy get more ferocious. The launch sequence graphics are very impressive and there is excellent sound to go with them. By not having the buggy move about in the corridors, you are left free to concentrate on firing, which is just as well! A neat touch is that your twin lasers are actually visible, and you can see them swinging about to aim on the enemy. Firebird have ensured a long play for this game by providing numerous types on enemy and several visual effects that some of the weapons produce. Throughout, the graphics and the sound are of a very high standard and all add to an addictive and very playable game.'

COMMENTS

Control keys: Q/W left/right, O/M up/down, X for Xion phasers, P for lasers (or the cursor keys)
Joystick: Protek, AGF
Keyboard play: well positioned and responsive
Use of colour: very good
Graphics: very good 3D, detailed, large and fast
Sound: excellent and varied
Skill levels: 8 sectors
Lives: 1 with percentage of damage
Screens: 8 sectors and several in-between screens
General rating: highly addictive, playable and an excellent shoot em up.

Use of computer	84%
Graphics	94%
Playability	91%
Getting started	93%
Addictive qualities	94%
Value for money	92%
Overall	**91%**

RALLY DRIVER

Producer: **Hill MacGibbon**
Memory Required: **48K**
Retail price: **£9.95**
Language: **machine code**
Author: **Five Ways Software**

In their series 'Games to stretch the mind', Hill MacGibbon have come up with some very detailed and innovative games that hover between being educational and downright exciting. *Rally Driver* is a simulation of a car rally which takes place over a very large mapped area of roads. It uses 3D road racer style graphics, with a moving road in perspective set against moving mountains. On the side there are bushes, trees and houses, all of which move in perspective as you pass them by. Because this is a rally and not a race track, there are also numerous side roads down which you may elect to drive, the object being to chose the shortest or quickest route to the stage finish.

Contained in the box along with the program is a large map which shows the roads you will be taking on the three increasingly difficult stages. Depending on weather conditions, some roads may be flooded and diversions will be indicated at the Time Controls. There are four Time Control points on stage 1, for instance. In between are Passage Controls, boards with a set of letters on them. When you reach a Time Control Point, the marshal will ask you to repeat the letters to see whether you stuck to the route properly. If you fail to answer correctly you incur a 20 second time penalty. You also incur time penalties for crashing your car, leaving allowed roads, travelling in the wrong direction up a road or for hitting spectators or farm animals. For the latter, you are equipped with a powerful horn, and using it makes the hazard lope casually off. Your other instruments include a speedo which goes up to 100mph and a handbrake onoff light.



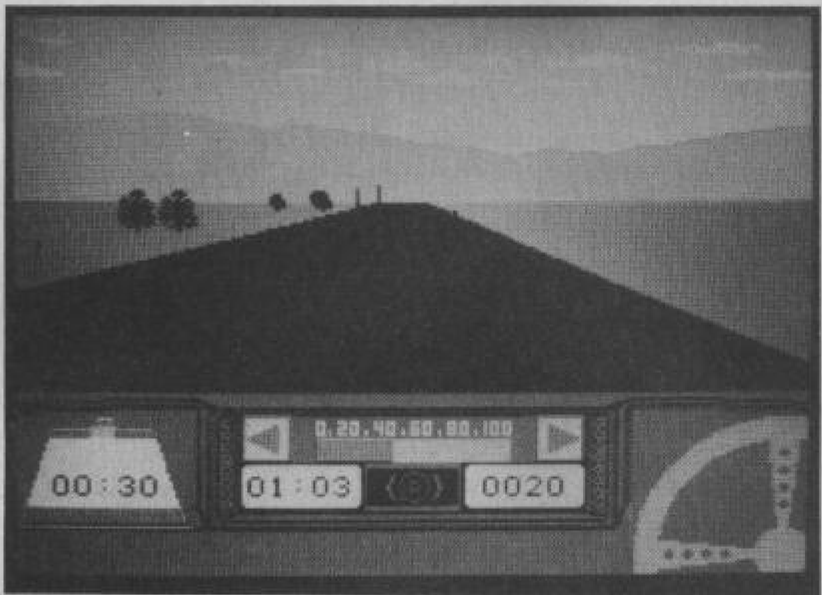
CRITICISM

● 'I wish all educational games were as much fun as *Rally Driver*. I find this game as compelling as their previous *Ballooning* game. What struck me with this game was the distinct fact that surely this must be the best racing car type game — better than Psion's *Chequered Flag* in my opinion. There are more trees, bushes and more realistic hazards such as cows, water and rivers flooding (whoever's seen oil splattered all over the road, as in *Chequered Flag*)? Mountains and clouds move very well, all adding to the realism of this game. As to the game itself, I would suggest it is a two-player game in the sense that one player needs to drive the damn car, and the other needs to navigate him/her around the huge, scenic and twisting course. Software houses seem to think that racing car games are difficult to reproduce with detail and still keep speed, and here a 'mere' educational package thrashes all others out of sight.'

● 'Rally Driver *is a 3D simulation with quite good graphics. The game has several realistic features such as a handbrake — useful when going into corners too fast! Also, the steering wheel self-straightens if you don't keep it turned in a specific direction. The main thing against this game is that it's difficult to play on your own. The driver cannot concentrate on the road, read messages and navigate from the map all at the same time. I suggest you play this game as any self-respecting rally driver — have a navig-*

ator! A point against addiction was the 'beat the clock' challenge can get tiring eventually. Overall a good simulation.'

● 'This is a bit expensive, but it is a good program, with plenty of content and back up. The map itself is quite entertaining, and the variables thrown in to make each play lively add to the overall flavour. Steering the car is a job for skillful hands — make no mistake, this may be intended as more of an educational type game than other 'road' games around, but it isn't for cissies! Very good indeed, and fun to play.'



Super 3D graphics and a varied, winding road make Hill MacGibbon's RALLY DRIVER into an unusual experience which goes better with two players.



COMMENTS

Control keys: 1/Œ steer left/right, Q/O turn left/right, 9/2 accelerate/brake, 3 handbrake toggle
Joystick: Sinclair 2, Kempston
Keyboard play: good positions, responsive
Use of colour: very good
Graphics: good 3D effect, fast for this type of game
Sound: not much, good horn
Skill levels: 3 stages
Lives: not applicable
Screens: scrolling
General rating: good to very good, plenty to do, well executed.

Use of computer	**73%**
Graphics	**80%**
Playability	**78%**
Getting started	**83%**
Addictive qualities	**75%**
Value for money	**71%**
Overall	**77%**

SON OF BLAGGER

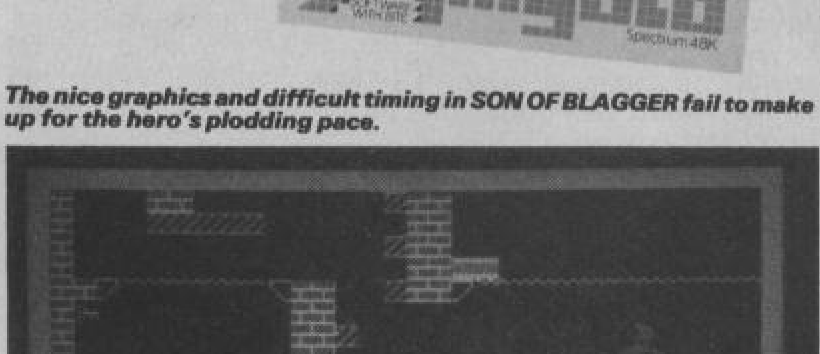
Producer: **Alligata**
Memory rquired: **48K**
Retail price: **£5.95**
Language: **machine code**
Author: **Elliot Gay**

Quite who the hero Blagger may be is not detailed in this game or why the son of Mr. Blagger should be called Slippery Sid who's real dad would appear to be another person called Roger the Dodger. It's all most confusing. What isn't so muddling is that Slippery Sid, attempting to out-emulate his famous dad, is working as an espionage agent deep inside Spectrum Security HQ on a task to collect all the golden keys dotted around the large scrolling complex. Quite why he should be doing this is not explained either and gives the feeling you've just walked into an exciting TV serial in the middle of episode three!

Son of Blagger is a large maze complex with platform overtones along the lines of *Jet Set Willy* or *Monty Mole*, although it tends to resemble the latter more. Within rooms, which are of various shapes and sizes, platforms are connected by downward escalators, upwards moving ladders or linked by dissolving floors. Various monster



The nice graphics and difficult timing in SON OF BLAGGER fail to make up for the hero's plodding pace.



robots prowl the premises on unvarying paths of destruction, guarding the keys. The screen 'window' scrolls periodically to keep Blagger's Son in the middle of the action. There are several levels to play through with a time limit imposed by falling air supply.

CRITICISM

● *'Son of Blagger* is a fairly slow *Manic Miner* type game. Apart from the screen layout, the graphics are not too good and a bit dated, and the sound, which only comes in a tune form, is affected, like the animation, by the scrolling screen. I saw this game for the CBM about six months ago and then it seemed quite impressive, but now on the Spectrum I've lowered my opinion of it. I think everyone's just about about had enough of games where all you do is pick up keys and time jumps.'

● *'First thing in this game I thought the graphics were most attractive — a major part of any game. Animation is great; detailed objects spin and rotate, 'you' walk very nicely. The main thing that spoils this game is the speed at which your man walks. I've heard of slow, I've heard of very slow, but this goes beyond a joke. The game*

gets tedious to play after a while, and collecting trivial objects like keys becomes a boring task. It's a shame that a game of this standard of quality of graphics is let down by the slow movement of the key item in the game—you. What can I say, buy the game and put up with the slow speed of play but enjoy the nice graphics, or not to buy the game and never to be able to see the colourful detail? The choice is yours.'

● 'There's a lot to see in *Son of Blagger*— that's if you can get to see it before the ever so slow pace of the hero and the irritation of having to constantly go back to the start each time you lose a life gets to you first. Graphics are cheerful, well drawn with plenty of details. The continuous tune is adequate, although it's a pity everything comes to a stop when the screen scrolls over a bit. But the real let down is the playability of the game. It's ruined by the sluggish pace of play, because otherwise, the combination of timing required with the movement of floors and nasties is perfect.'

COMMENTS

Control keys: Z/X left/right, SPACE to jump
Joystick: doesn't need one
Keyboard play: responsive enough
Use of colour: very good
Graphics: large, detailed, and varied
Sound: continuous tune with on/off facility
Skill levels: 1
Lives: 3
Screens: many, scrolling
Special features: protection colour code is printed on inlay — very sensible and user-friendly
General rating: what should be an excellent and interesting game spoiled by poor pacing.

Use of computer	80%
Graphics	79%
Playability	45%
Getting started	63%
Addictive qualities	43%
Value for money	56%
Overall	**61%**

ACCELERATOR

Producer: **Century City**
Memory required: **48K**
Retail price: **£1.99**
Language: **machine code**
Author: **Curtis Jones Software**



This game has a commendably brief inlay as far as the typical blurb goes, and confines its bigger flights of fantasy to the on-screen instructions which tell you that it is the end of the 25th century and the human race is in the worst state of decline since the end of the 20th century. Ravaged by a 200 year war with the alien confederates, the remnants of our once great race are scattered throughout the universe, on remote, barren hostile planets. The only planet inhabited by humans that is not reverting to the cave era is Sol. From Sol come scoutships. Their missions: to boldly go where no scoutships have gone before. Their task: to locate the last human settlements. It is from one of these missions that your ship, The United States of Sol scoutship Accelerator, encounters a massive alien fleet. Too late to run, you have no choice but to perform the first strategy of defence – attack!

And if you think you've heard something like this before, please don't write in to say so!

What *Accelerator* turns out to be is a space shoot em up of the old school but with up to date graphics. It plays not unlike *Arcadia*, but your ship is free to move all over the screen as well as firing forwards or backwards. The attack waves of aliens come from either side, but in one direction per wave, crossing and recrossing the screen until all are dead. Each wave provides a different alien type, some of them very large, and they are all firing constantly. The space war takes place against a scrolling background of stars, and the only other features are three mines sown diagonally across the screen, which will explode your ship should you hit one. Score, hi-score, lives and fuel remaining are shown at the bottom of the screen. Fuel equals bullets, and when it has run out, so has your time until a wave is cleared.

CRITICISM

● 'This takes me back to the early days of arcade games – that's not saying the game is primitive because the graphics are of the fast, smooth moving type, and are also very detailed, really quite lovely in fact. This game is a definite shoot em up game with no wandering either side, just mindless blow em to smithereens. It starts off fairly easily with large battleships to blow up and it continually gets more difficult as the enemy comes in larger quantities, at faster rates and in smaller vessels. *Accelerator* is an incredibly hi-scoring game and will probably appeal to the type of person who loves high scores.'

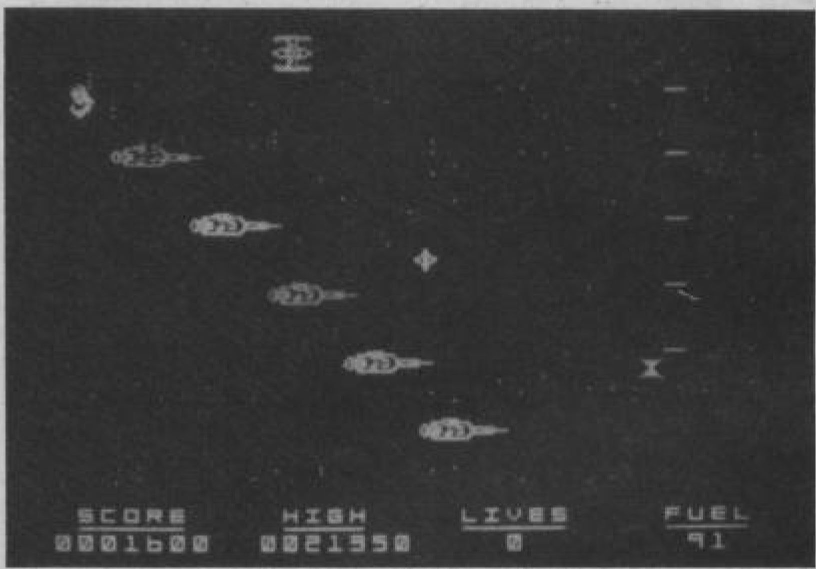
● *'Shoot em ups are getting rarer by the day. There is still a place for them, but it's hard to feel thrilled if the graphics are poor (as they used to be).* Accelerator *is not let down on that score with varied and detailed characters zapping each other against a background of deep space, using powerful and colourful lasers of the type more commonly seen in Lunar Landscapes. The explosions, too, are very realistic and the sound works to help the atmosphere. In other words, this game is a good shoot em up of the old type, and if you like em, you'll like this one. Overall, quite nicely done, playable, but perhaps not very addictive.'*

● 'I'm not sure whether there is still a market for simple shoot em up games these days, but *Accelerator* being a cheapie, it will probably sell in large quantities because the graphics are nicely produced, and vary from wave to wave, some of them looking like ships out of Blake's 7. Reading the instructions for this game, the thought came to me, why is it always me, and solely me, that has to save the universe? I must be a great hero by now, having saved so many universes, but no mind, it's all in the average day's work of an average person. Several features I like about this game, which I have not seen before, include the starry background scrolling behind the foreground of starfighter ships, a very effective and neat addition. Probably, without this effect it could make the game tiring to play, it does seem to break the monotony of the black background. Another feature is that when a wave attacks you it does not attack all at the same speed as most of these games do, but at varying speeds from snail's pace to warp speed, and in cases where the spaceships are tiny, this can pose several problems in trying to zap them. Another neat feature is the fuel counter. It does not drop by itself but instead, every time you fire your laser your fuel count is reduced by one, so care is needed in zapping. To sum up, it can be called a fast, rigorous, sole shoot em up game, quite neat but possibly it isn't totally addictive, but then again, how many cheapies are? It is the type of product where you play continuously for a day or so and then throw it away in the bin.'

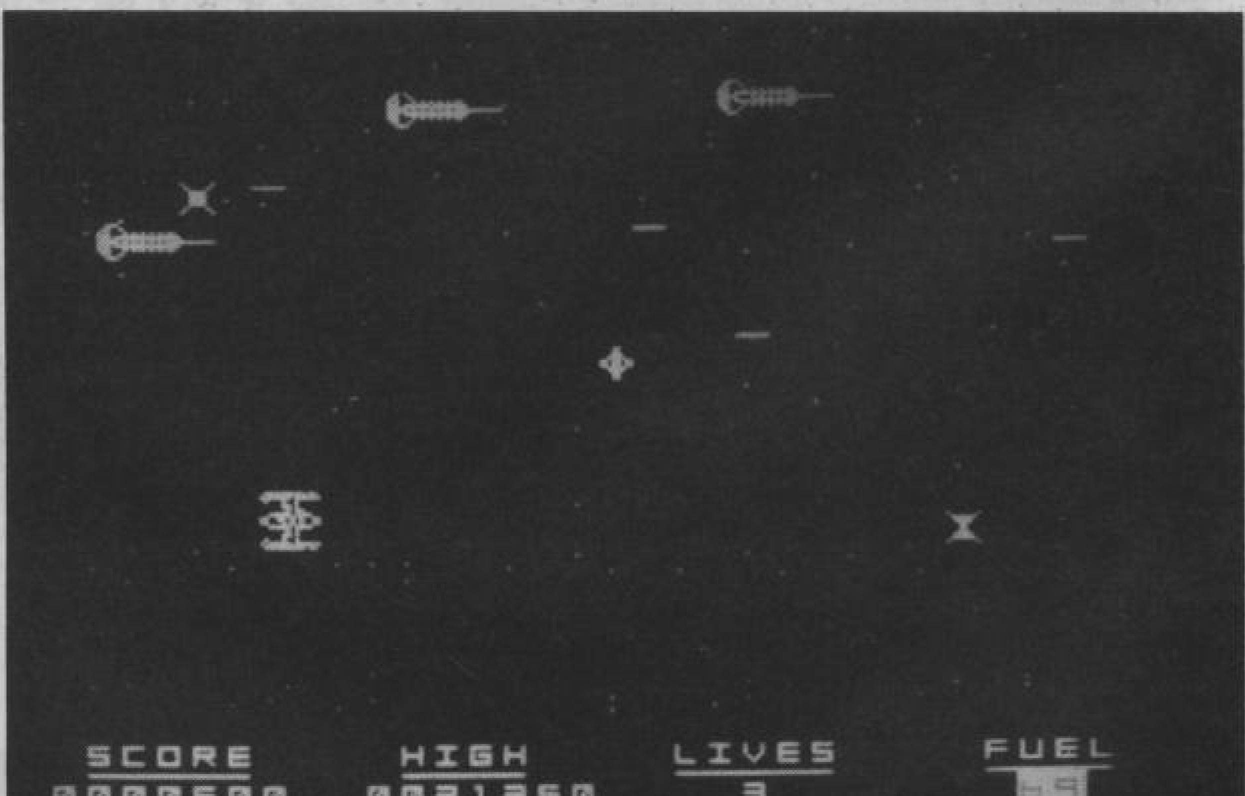
COMMENTS

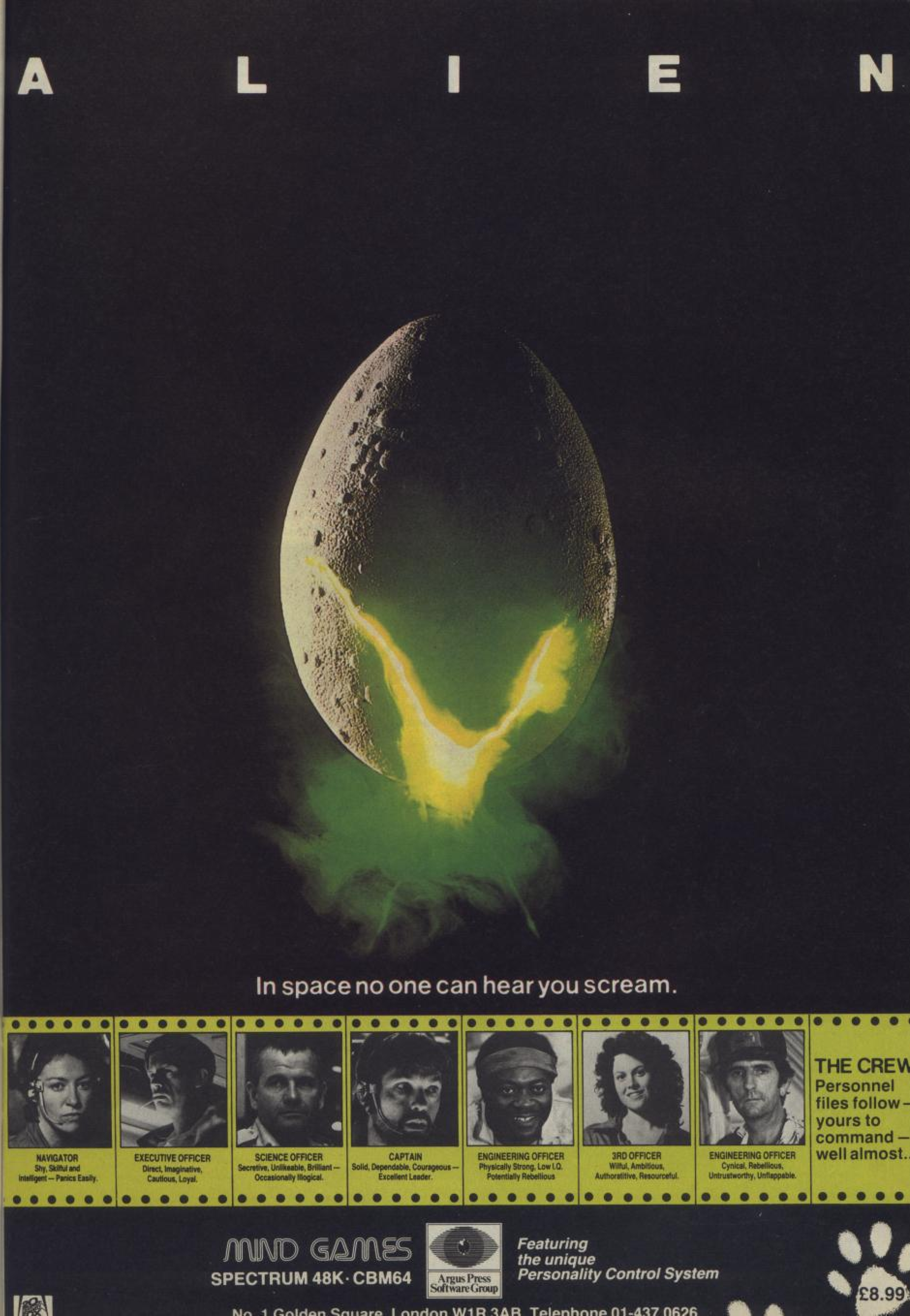
Control keys: Q/A up/down, O/P left/right, SPACE to fire, 1 to start game
Joystick: Sinclair 2
Keyboard play: quite responsive, sensible positions
Use of colour: very good
Graphics: good, large and detailed with excellent explosions
Sound: laser and explosion effects, quite good
Skill levels: 1
Lives: 5
Screens: 20 attack waves
General rating: average shoot em up distinguished by graphics.

Use of computer	**68%**
Graphics	**75%**
Playability	**73%**
Getting started	**70%**
Addictive qualities	**38%**
Value for money	**70%**
Overall	**66%**



A sort of up-dated Arcadia in Century City's ACCELERATOR

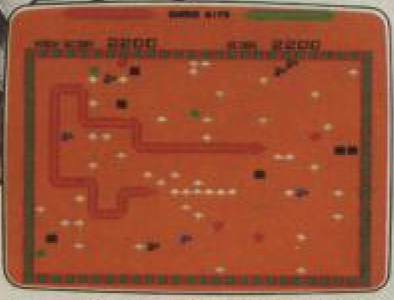




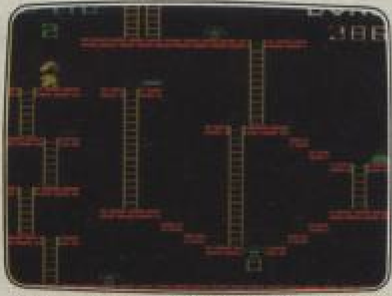
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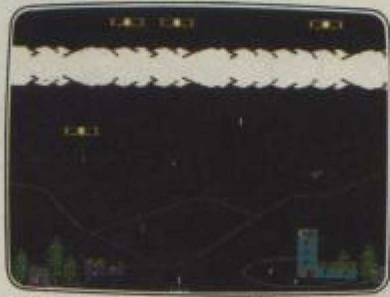
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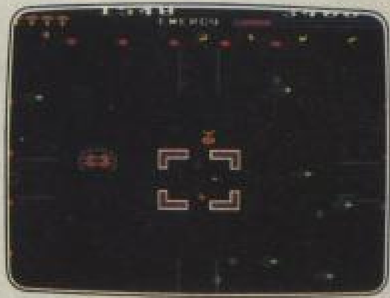
004 Arcade BBC MICRO B
GOLD DIGGER – The hazards of digging for gold down under.



005 Arcade BBC MICRO B
DUCK! – Comedy and music in this duck shoot.



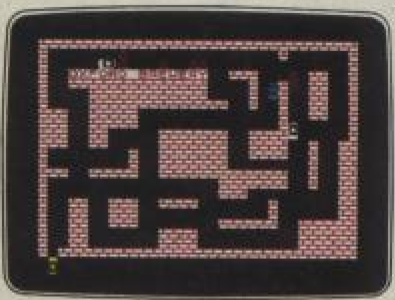
013 Arcade BBC MICRO B
ACID DROPS – Fly through to tackle the mutant spinners.



022 Arcade BBC MICRO B
ESTRA – Recover the sacred statue of Estra the snake god.



023 Arcade/Strategy BBC MICRO B
THE HACKER – Terminal to modem, telephone network to mainframe.



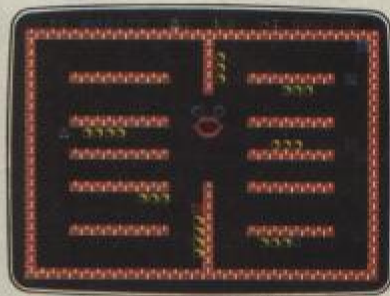
006 Arcade SPECTRUM 16K/48K
RUN BABY RUN – Multi-car cop chase and shoot-out.



009 Arcade SPECTRUM 16K/48K
TERRA FORCE – Terra man defends earth against all odds.



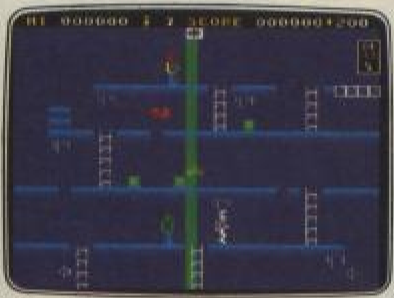
010 Arcade SPECTRUM 16K/48K
MENACE – What happens when teacher turns his back.



021 Arcade SPECTRUM 16K/48K
CRAZY CAVERNS – Ten crazy caverns, ten hungry mouths to feed.



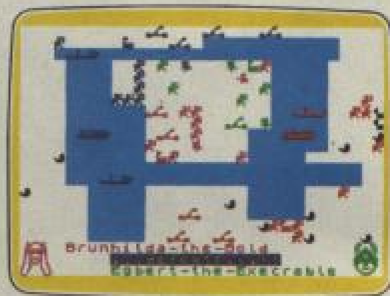
007 Arcade SPECTRUM 48K
EXODUS – Strange creatures emerging from the pits.



014 Arcade/Strategy SPECTRUM 48K
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A CRASH Smash

AIRWOLF

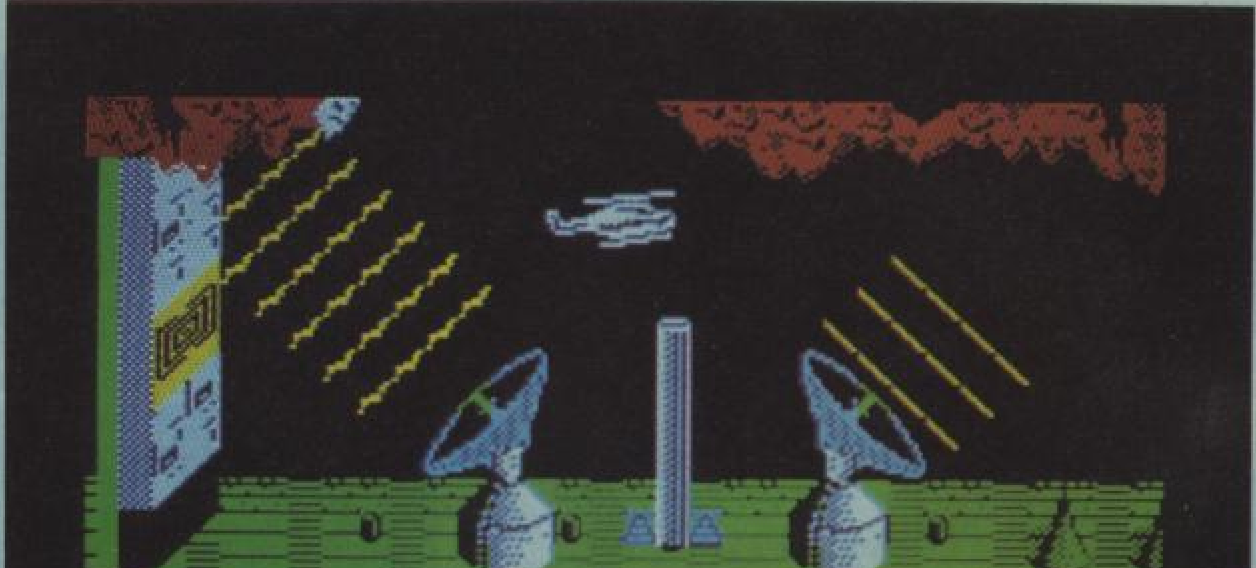
Producer: **Elite**
Memory required: **48K**
Retail price: **£6.95**
Language: **machine code**
Author: **Richard Wilcox**

As Stringfellow Hawke, a former Vietnam chopper pilot, and the only man in the free world trained to fly the billion-dollar helicopter Airwolf, you have been assigned a dangerous rescue mission by the 'Firm'.

Five important US scientists are being held hostage deep in a subterranean base beneath the scorching Arizona desert. You must guide Airwolf on a series of perilous missions and bring about their release, each scientist one at a time. Only destruction of the defence control boxes strategically positioned within the cavern will allow Airwolf to descend to the heart of the base where the scientists are held.

So says the exciting inlay to this new game from Elite, the officially licensed version of the recent hit TV series starring Jan Micahel Vincent and Ernest Borgnine.

The action takes place over several interlinked, scrolling screens, starting above ground. On the first two screens you are immediately faced with the defence fields, assembled boxes of blue which must be shot away box by box with the Airwolf's powerful cannon. the problem is that the entire field regenerates itself within only a few seconds and you have to start all over again. Gaining the passage takes you along to the cavern entrance, also guarded by a similar field, only now you are shooting down. From there on each cave is guarded by large guns, electric fields, and the very narrowness of the cavern passages makes life tough. To survive a screen is not to be finished with it, since your actions on another screen may well alter the situation on the earlier one, allowing you to backtrack to get a stage further.



All in a day's work: Death rays...



Airwolf is a thoroughbred helicopter and like any aristocrat is difficult to handle, one problem being that it has to be flown to keep it airborne, none of this negative gravity to help with the shooting.

... and lethal caverns



CRITICISM

● '*Airwolf* is one of those games you're either going to be terribly addicted to and play to death, or you're going to switch it off. It's not that the game is bad, on the contrary it's very good. BUT it's so damn hard to get into and it takes practice just to get through the first obstacle. Like all other Elite games, *Airwolf* has very good graphics and the sound is alright. Your helicopter responds well to your actions and the game is fun to play (it would be better with a couple of friends)! If you fancy yourself a bit of an arcade ace then Airwolf could well prove you wrong! A vital accessory for this game is a strong firing finger — without it, you're lost before you start. *Airwolf* is a slick program that is worth buying because it will keep you entertained for ages.'

● '*Licensed games from well known films or TV often have little to do with the original, relying on the original to sell them.* Airwolf *is no exception — okay it is a helicopter, but so what, and so what indeed,* Airwolf *doesn't need Jan Michael to sell it, the game can do it all by itself. This is one of the meanest arcade shoot em ups since they brought Scramble out on the big machines. The pace is violent, furiously fast and will totally destroy your index finger in the process. The game is hard and allows you no respite — you no sooner get through a defence ring and onto another screen with a sigh of relief and NO — it's off again. Thrilling stuff! One clever touch is the neat recovery of a mistake made on the inlay which omits to tell you the fire-button. The loading screen finishes with the large words C TO SHOOT. Press C at your peril!'*

● 'There's more to this game than meets the eye. At first I thought it was a damned difficult game with seemingly little content, just pretty graphics, with realistic shaded trees and snow--capped mountain tops in the distance. Looks good, eh? Well, after about an hour and a half of trying to remove a sing wall I was through, no, not through with the game, through with the wall, and then there was another wall, another half an hour of perseverance was spent on it. I was through, YIPPEE! At last, I could get into the game for real, down into the deep dark depths of the caverns I dropped to find ray guns trying to destroy me. Little did they know I was more intelligent than that, frantically shooting what looked like a doorstop, it opened another cavern — exciting isn't it? On I went to forcefields, my goodness, they were tough to get through, but me being me, I got through it. Faced with torturous cannon as they tried to take pot shots at me, lucky was I that I had a high-performance jetcopter — convenient isn't it? Then there was a moron of a cannon, would it let me through? No it wouldn't let me through it shot in every direction. What do I do, I thought, as my limp finger was dropping off the fire button and my joystick was smoking with action and rage. Well, that's for you to find out. This game is incredibly difficult, but highly playable and addictive. Graphics are neat and futuristic, detail is quite an asset to this game. Elite have gone back into the air again with a winner. Why not buy it — then you can suffer, as much as I have had to do.'

COMMENTS

Control keys: Q to T/A to G up/down, Z/X left/right, C to shoot
Joystick: Kempston
Keyboard play: very responsive and well laid out for left or right hands
Use of colour: excellent
Graphics: very detailed, smooth and imaginative, with very good scrolling
Sound: good
Skill levels: 1 with progressive difficulty
Lives: 5
Screens: 12
General rating: addictive, playable and fun, excellent.

Use of computer	85%
Graphics	92%
Playability	91%
Getting started	89%
Addictive qualities	95%
Value for money	90%
Overall	**90%**


RACE
MOVI SOFT 2

DELIGHTS

Product: Joy Sensor
Producer: Suncom
Retail price: £29.95

SENSORIAL

Suncom's *Joy Sensor* certainly doesn't look like your average joystick, in fact it appears to originate from the Enterprise battleship's command console. Is this the ultimate games weapon or does the lack of a gripping stick represent a step back to the old ZX81 misery membrane keyboard?



Ungrippable controller

CONSTRUCTION

The silver grey unit resembles the usual flat TV remote control units, but obviously the protruding cable tells a different story. Where normally a stick adorns the enclosure there is a round depression with the four main directions and four diagonals indicated in black and red. This surface is obviously a touch sensitive switch area. Control is gained by poking one of the hand's digits inside the round recess and moving the finger in any of the eight directions required. Since the sensor is not pressure sensitive, the finger can glide frictionless across the surface and the speed of changing direction is only dependent on the finger dexterity of the player. A slide switch above the control area enables or disables the diagonal movements. Further up is the fire sensor area with a lefthand and righthand firing position and a central rapid fire area. Due to its design the unit is very robust. The only moving part is in fact the slide switch, which requires a fair amount of force. The manufacturer's guarantee does not extend to the player's fingers however. The *Joy Sensor's* cable terminates into an Atari compatible D type connector and this means any of the existing Spectrum joystick interfaces may be used.

SENSURROUND

Putting the *Joy Sensor* through its paces requires a lot of finger work. The unit certainly gives a new meaning to poking with your finger. Several techniques were tried out, but most players preferred using the index finger.

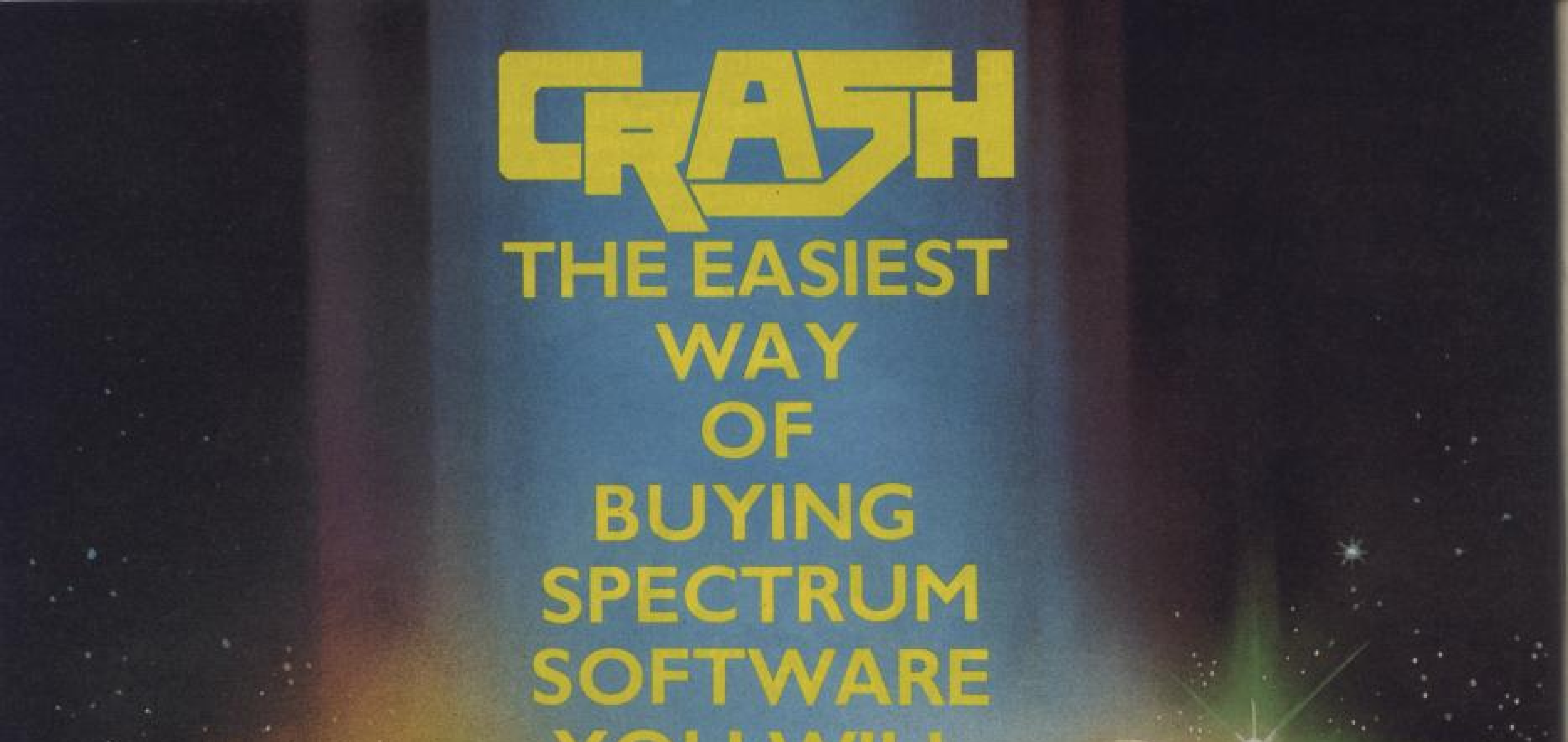
Platform games work out fine with the touch control, as toggling into position is fast and accurate. Controlling cockpit-style games is easy enough, although the major disadvantage here is that there is no sense of realism. Flying a plane with a touch pad just doesn't prove to be very exciting although excellent control can be achieved. Here joysticks like the *Quickshot 2* obviously score highly as you get the feel of holding the rudder of a real starship fighter and get real satisfaction out of blowing enemy fighters to kingdom come by firing away on the trigger fire button. With the *Joy Sensor* this all becomes very efficient and clinical.

Where the *Joy Sensor* does score over conventional joysticks is at athletic meetings. With the touch pad the player becomes a real track scorcher and even Daley Thompson ought to watch out in his rear mirror. . . .

CONCLUSION

The *Joy Sensor* is not every player's ultimate weapon control. Admittedly the control can be superior in accuracy, speed and reaction to the conventional joystick, but what it is lacking in is sense of excitement and realism and this is after all a very important aspect of games playing.


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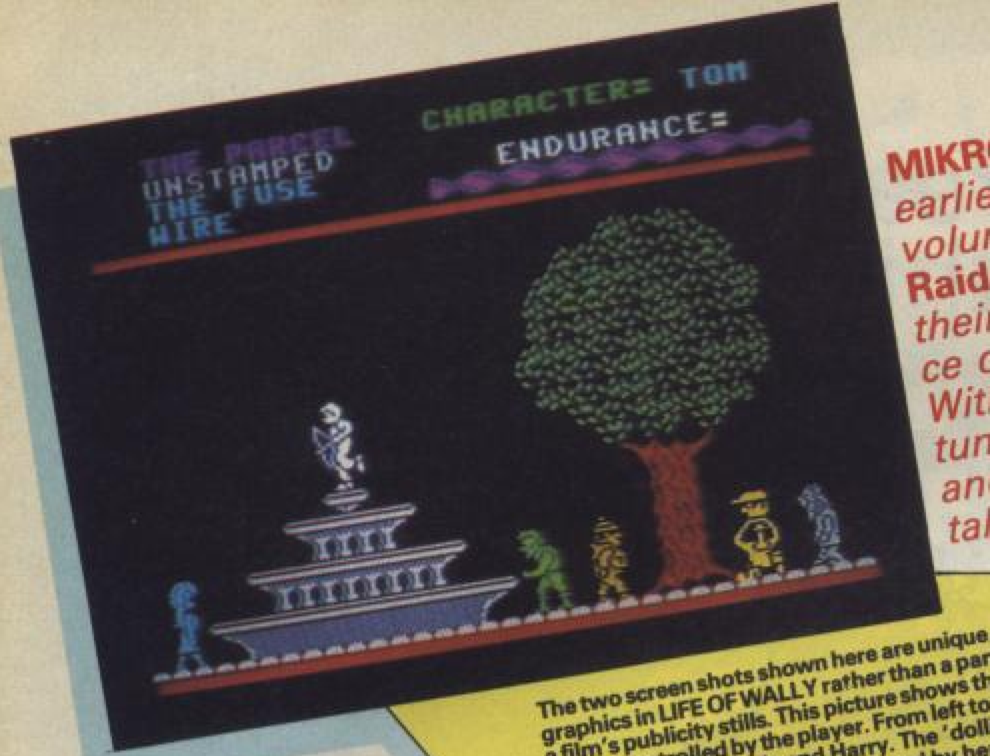
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MIKRO-GEN *have been around since the earliest days and have produced a high volume of software among which* **Cosmic Raiders** *and* **Mad Martha** *might be counted their only well known hits until the emergence of the unlikely character* **WALLY WEEK.** *With Wally in tow, Mikro-Gen's dwindling fortunes took a dramatic upturn.* **MIKE MEEK** *and* **PAUL DENIAL** *took a trip to Ludlow and talked to* **ROGER KEAN.**



The two screen shots shown here are unique, in as much as they represent the graphics in LIFE OF WALLY rather than a particular screen. In fact they are like a film's publicity stills. This picture shows the five main characters, all of whom can be controlled by the player. From left to right: Wilma Week, Tom, Dick, (the unmistakeable) Wally and Harry. The 'dolliest' woman on computers, Wally's wife Wilma, is about to be hindered by her beloved offspring Herbert. Watch out for Herbert – he's growing fast and will soon be starring in a series all of his own.



You can't help having a soft spot for certain people and companies, sometimes because of circumstances, sometimes because they are pleasant and sometimes both as is the case with Mikro-Gen. In August 1983 the fledgling mail order company Crash Micro Games Action took its first ever promotional step into the public eye and had a stand at that month's ZX Microfair in London's Alexandra Palace. Arriving early on the Friday afternoon the day before the show and staggering under the weight of our first ever mail order catalogue (a massive 16 pages of black and white newsprint) to take possession of our six foot by two foot table, we discovered that the whole end of the square block we were on was empty of tables. The only other early arrivals were busily filling it with their blue custom--built stand bearing the words MIKRO-GEN. Naturally conversations were struck up and one of our catalogues duly passed over. To their delight, Mad Martha received a good mini-review in it. At the time, none of us present knew that the humble little catalogue would turn into CRASH Magazine within another six months.

Little incidents like that meeting stick in the mind. In the intervening year and a half CRASH has had occasion to review much Mikro-Gen product, some of it interesting, occasionally good, but never seemingly all that inspiring – until Wally happened.

With *Automania*, Mikro-Gen developed a game to change their fortunes with graphics and playability to match. But most importantly they developed a real character in Wally Week on which to build. *Pyjamarama* confirmed that success and went further, being a game which required thinking as well as playing skills. The third in the series, *Life of Wally*, affectionately referred to as Wally III, is nearly completed ready for release in February and Mikro-Gen are happy that it will be as much of an advance on *Pyjamarama* as that was on *Automania*.

I asked Paul and Mike who invented Wally and was firmly informed that they work as a team. Paul, technically labelled Sales Manager, actually visualised Wally, and to my surprise emerged as the man who actually draws the striking adverts. But if proof were needed that Wally has become a very real character, then it's offered by the fact that good fictional characters start writing themselves after a bit.

Paul said, 'We are already having difficulties in discussion about Wally's character himself. There was something that came up in discussion last night which I particularly didn't like, something that was to go into this new game, *Life of Wally*, because it seemed totally out of character. It's not the sort of thing that Wally would do, and I was dead set against it. It depends on the interpretation – but it might suit one of the other characters in that game. But then again, you've got to be careful not to fall into a trap, because in a way you can do anything with Wally, which you can't with, say, *Jet Set Willy*. Willy was a nicely drawn character but not a social character, so he's more limited.

Mike added, 'I believe Wally is one of the few humanised computer characters out there.'

So if Wally is the result of a team effort, who actually does the programming work? Mikro-Gen currently has five programmers on the team, Chris Hinsley, Del McLoughlin, Andy Lawrie, David Parry and Nigel Brownjohn. Who's done the Wally programs? Paul frowned when I asked the question.

'Eight or ten of us sit down and - it's an initial think tank. We don't really believe in making a star, it's not the way a software house should work. We cannot say that Chris Hinsley programmed *Pyjamarama*. Alright, David Parry did the adaption for the Amstrad, as far as hitting the keys, but it really is a team effort.'

So do they prefer to see a software house as more like a film unit than a publisher with star authors?

'Yes, we do look on it like being a film,' said Paul. 'You see the thing is that certain routines or certain styles, Chris either didn't know or was having difficulty with, so





Mike Meek



Paul Denial

PROPER WALLY

Andy Lawrie who is the technical director comes in. Andy oversees the whole operation, what Andy doesn't know isn't worth knowing. So you can't say that Chris alone programmed it because there are things in there that wouldn't have been in it if Chris alone had done it. No it's more the film unit thing.'

A team effort would hardly be worth anything if the members were widely scattered, and in keeping with their think tank theories all the programmers work in-house. Mikro-Gen operates from two sets of premises, there's Bracknell which houses the marketing, sales and despatch side, and then there's Ashford in Middlesex which, in the words of Mike, is the nice hushed offices with the coolers for the computers going.

Discussion rapidly moved onto Wally III and the innovations they are developing. As Mike pointed out, *Life of Wally* is being worked on by the same programmers as did *Pyjamarama*, so the graphics will be of a similar quality. The real advance is being made in the way the game will play.

'What we are doing,' said Paul, 'is we're having several characters on the screen and they will be sabotaging Wally, or maybe helping him. On the whole we've taken a very logical progression, whether you call them arcade games or adventure games which have become tied together as arcade adventures, doesn't matter. Now, what has happened with adventure games is that instead of controlling one central character, in things like *Lords of Midnight* you're controlling several characters, but in an adventure game. What we're doing with *Life of Wally* is we're taking *Pyjamarama* one step further into adventure whereby you're controlling five central characters. You've got Wally, his wife Wilma, Tom, Dick and Harry. All of whom are different characters, and will operate different ways.'

'Wilma is amazing,' Mike interjected.

Paul laughs; 'I have to tell you this – Wilma is amazing! I always had it in my mind – and we had great fights about this – that Wilma would be the archetypal dragon. She's not, she's gorgeous, she's a real dolly.'

'Dolliest woman you could wish to see on the computer screen,' said Mike, modestly adding, 'within that size character.'

Paul: 'And all these different people are going to have different tasks to complete within the game. We're not telling you what they are, but as you progress through the game you are going to have to find out what those tasks are.'

The outline for *Life of Wally* is that within a town the five main characters have to perform certain tasks to keep the town functioning. Repairing the clocks, repairing the jail and so on. Mikro-Gen are not telling people which of the five characters has to do what, and neither will they tell people in what particular order things have to be done.

This increasing complexity in games is what helps keep everything alive, and the interdependence of characters and objects and actions makes for a more enjoyable game, but it also makes it harder for lots of players too, and the proliferation of playing tips is an indication of how much effort these games need. I asked whether magazines were spoiling the fun by printing tips and maps too soon.

Paul: 'To some degree, yes, if they are printed too early.'

Mike: 'During the *Pyjamarama* launch in London in September, someone from *Computer & Video Games* said to David Parry – he's only a teenager, handled himself incredibly well – have you got a map? He said yes, of course we've got a map. They said, are you going to let us have it? He said No. And they said, well you know we'll only draw our own. He said Okay you can do but it'll be wrong, and just that one statement precluded them from printing a map.'

'Yours was the first to come out, but that was great timing, especially with the tips that went with it, because you didn't give the whole game away,' said Paul. Mike went on, 'We are outlining roughly the main tasks but it's up to them to find out the rest of those tasks. If somebody wants to say, yes, for those of you having difficulty Tom's got to do that, then why not? Fine and help them along. But the longer shelf life stems from the fact that nobody is solving it. The difficulty is in making it simple enough for a seven year old kid to play as well as keeping the interest of an eighteen year old brilliant guy. You see, we had a problem in that *Pyjamarama* was good, but it would have been better if we could have stopped people solving it quite so quickly. It's frightening how good they are – our pogrammers thought it would be a considerable period of time, but there you go. So what we're doing is splitting it up so that Wally gets a morning tea break, then he gets his dinner, then his afternoon tea break. You see there is a great conflict between making things too difficult so that the players

feel they have not accomplished anything that day, and making people want to keep on and on and keeping a sort of mystique in that area. And we feel we've got over it by introducing this tea break idea. 'I've got to the morning tea break.' 'Have you? I've got up to dinner!' This keeps people talking about it all the time. We believe people will want to go on wanting to play if they've reached a certain point. We're open to constructive criticism in this area, if that's the way people don't think the game should go then we are quite willing to accept that. But certainly with these breaks people will have a level of achievement that they didn't necessarily have before and it should make it last for a longer period of time than *Pyjamarama* lasted for.

Any sensible hero likes to see his line perpetuated and Wally is obviously no exception, for *Life of Wally* will see the introduction of his son and heir – Herbert.

'He's the only character that can't be controlled,' said Mike. 'Wally and Wilma's son – he's crawling about, and keeps getting in everyone's way. But the interesting thing is that in our next piece of software which we are already planning for after Wally III, Herbert has actually got to the stage of walking.'

So the Week family is spreading out. I couldn't resist asking whether Herbert will have a flat cap like Wally.

Paul replied, 'No, but he's got a little curl of hair. And he's going to get lost in the apartment. You'll see Wally and Wilma stuck just inside the door. It's going to generate another character.

Wally has helped Mikro-Gen create more than just more characters. They believe they are going against the current trend of adapting well known books, TV series or films to computer games by crossing Wally over from computer games to other media. As Mike explained; 'We don't know if we can pull it off, but we're going to have a damned good try – we're going to try to promote Wally and make him strong and go in from the computer side. It's interesting to note that everyone is trying to 'cross over' from films or TV to the computer, but not the other way around.'

Paul added, 'We're working from a very successful computer game and then taking it across via music, instead of doing it the other way round like *Ghostbusters*. They're playing on the hit film and pop single, *Tripods*, they're playing on the BBC thing, we're doing it the other way round.'

Music? I asked where music came into their plans.

'What we are doing with *Life of Wally*,' said Paul, 'is that on the reverse side of the cassette there will be a piece of music by a pop star, can't say who yet because the contracts haven't been signed yet, and at the moment someone is writing a piece of Wally music which, if it's good enough will be performed on the reverse side by this pop star and promoted in its own right as a single. The other alternative is that we have a record which does slot perfectly into the *Life of Wally* and neither is an adaption of the other, which the same pop star will perform, depending on how the music turns out.'

In addition to the pop single, Mike and Paul are discussing several other ideas to extend the 'crossing' over effect of Wally. He naturally lends himself to a cartoon strip both drawn and possibly even animated, and the popularity of the character has already led to other demands on Mikro-Gen from the general public. Mike – 'As you probably realise we never hide from the public every advert that we carry, every jacket, we put the phone number on, so if there's a problem we like to hear about it. We have a girl on the end virtually non stop – and we've had some incredible responses -'

Paul interrupted, laughing, 'Yeah, you were rotten to that guy last week! He rang up and said, 'Hello, I've just solved *Pyjamarama*,' 'Yeah?' 'Oh, am I the first?' 'No, not quite the first – we've had about 10,000 so far!'

'I wasn't that bad! But we certainly have had thousands ringing up to say they have completed it, and demands for a club too. I never realised that people would want to join a Wally club, but we've had people wanting to know if there is a Wally club. It doesn't sound like a bad idea. What we will be doing is some Wally badges.'

Has Wally eclipsed any other ideas, I wondered? But it seems not. With their newly rediscovered confindence, Mikro-Gen's team is trying out some varied ideas, as Mike explained.

'Well there's *Witches Cauldron* which is a sort of very light hearted super-graphics adventure. You're a frog and you've got to turn back into a human being. Then there's *ATC* which is an incredibly technical program. Then there's *Treasure Island* – that's only a convenient working title, it won't be called that of course. We're trying different things in the market place now. *Witches Cauldron* is a program that has reasonable graphics, in it, but if you put a lot of animation in then you sacrifice the actual adventure. Because the memory that the animated graphics take up you prohibit the writing of the actual adventure. What exactly does the general public actually want? Do they want a complex text adventure with good graphics, or do they want something like *Pyjamarama* that has no text in it but is a sort of graphical adventure? And by marketing programs like *Witches Cauldron* we've got to let the ball have a fair run in order to see how programs like that actually sell. We're happy with the quality of the program, but what I'm scared of is people saying that it hasn't got the animation we're used to seeing from Mikro-Gen. I think at some point a reviewer is going to say that.'

It's always a problem if you set a standard to stick to it, and sometimes the standard isn't suitable to the product. But I wondered whether they were looking seriously at microdrives to increase available memory and thus include *Pyjamarama* style graphics with text adventures.

'We're so unhappy with the microdrive in our software house,' Mike replied. 'The cartridges are so expensive. For several months now we have the Timex disk drive and it's gorgeous. You will be impressed with them believe me. The only problem is that it's the three inch drive and you can't get them easily, but I would see more chance in the long term of a company like Timex capturing that market.'

At that point we had to conclude the chat because Ludlow is quite a stretch from Bracknell, and the afternoon was wearing on rapidly. So Paul and Mike headed south again, back to the think tank, badges, pop songs and Wally character development. The results of their endeavours will soon be evident when *Life of Wally* is released on February the 17th at the LET show.





ADVENTURE GAMES IN THE CLASSROOM

Rosetta Mcleod *is the Principal Teacher of English at Linksfield Academy in Aberdeen. She has recently had a book published by Melbourne House called* **Learning with Adventure Programs**. *Here, she explains some of the reasoning behind the use of computer games in the classroom.*

Since the Department of Trade and Industry's offer entitling each primary school to a half-price computer, the majority of primary schools in Great Britain now have at least one micro. The number of micros in secondary schools is also increasing rapidly — but to what use are all these computers being put?

In secondary schools, subjects like Computer Studies are being introduced into the curriculum and usually come under the control of the Mathematics department. In these courses, children are taught programming skills, but I believe that there are other ways in which teachers with no knowledge of computing can use microcomputers in their classrooms. The obvious way, of course, is to use commercially available educational programs – the ones for English for example, are designed mainly for individual use, and purport to help with spelling, grammar, punctuation etc. These can be very useful in their own way, but what the majority of teachers require, is a way of using a computer with a whole class.

Over the last year, I have been experimenting with the use of adventure programs in the classroom and have been greatly encouraged by pupil response. Good quality adventures can act as a useful stimulus both in primary schools, where they can form the central core of project work, and in the English departments of secondary schools, where they can be used to foster skills in reading, writing, talking and listening. The first adventure program I used in the classroom was *The Hobbit* (Melbourne House).

First of all, my English class of around 30 Third Year pupils of below average ability, read the opening chapters of Tolkien's novel and discussed the main characters and the clues given in these chapters. Looking for clues which would help us play the adventure game was seen as a fun task, but also provided useful practice in close examination of a text. The pupils also studied selected extracts from the player guide to the program and undertook discussion and written work on computer**Inglish**, rules of grammar, parts of speech etc, before beginning to play the adventure. Initially, the children needed a fair amount of direction on the sort of commands to input, but after a short time they all had a good idea of the **Inglish** to use.

As we went through the early stages of the game, we drew a map to keep track of the directions we were taking and the locations we were arriving at. Using the program in this way led to very valuable oral work; we discussed at length the commands to type in, and where disagreement arose, various pupils were asked to argue their case, which they did remarkably well, referring to the text of the novel and to the map to back up their point of view.

The work unit, then, proceeded along these lines: we read a few chapters at a time of the novel, then we used the computer program to take Bilbo and his friends along the stage of the journey that we had read about. The children completed a variety of assignments under the four skills of reading, writing, talking and listening, and were greatly stimulated by the adventure game.

The success of this particular unit encouraged me to devise other units of work which I have described in detail in a book *Learning with Adventure Programs* (Melbourne House). In a unit on *Valhalla* (Legend) which involved the use of a number of stories from Norse mythology, I devised an assignment using a review of the game from CRASH magazine — a review which seemed to me to be particularly well-structured and well-expressed. My book also relates how I made use of the designer program *The Quill* to stimulate the creative imagination.

The work I prepared around these programs was initially designed for use in the English department of a secondary school, but some sections have been tried out with great success in primary schools. I believe that classrooms should provide exciting and stimulating learning opportunities, but all too often education is book- or worksheet-centred largely because of the preference of the teacher. I have found that adventure games can stimulate even the most reluctant pupil and can be used by the teacher to promote sound educational aims.

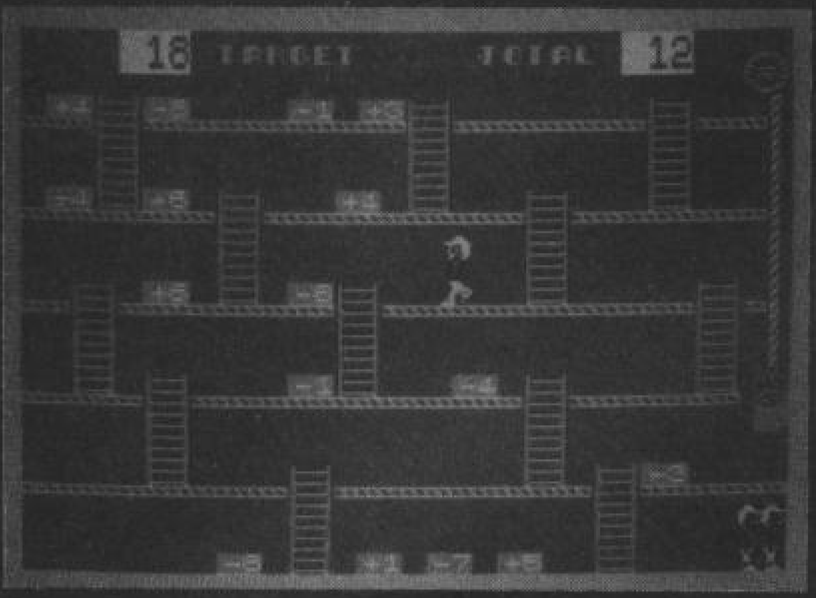
Many of my pupils are now regular readers of CRASH magazine – they read avidly the reviews of new adventure games in the hope of finding a game which they can suggest to me for use in the classroom!

REVIEWS

NUMBER PAINTER

Producer: **Sinclair**
Memory required: **16K**
Retail price: **£4.95**
Language: **machine code**
Author: **Psion**
Age group: 5-14 years

Sinclair have released a new range of educational software. This game turns out to be a rewarding mathematics game using the 'Painter' and 'Platform' ideas. The screen display shows six platforms connected by ladders. The player controls a painter who must be guided around the screen collecting numbers. These are displayed in magenta boxes and green boxes. When the painter passes over a box, pressing SPACE will collect the number. Those in the magenta boxes have a positive or negative value, while those in the green boxes will divide or multiply the total. This total is shown at the top right



An unusual variation of the painter and platform game manages to make education into fun as well.

of the screen. On the other side is a target figure and the aim is simple enough, collect numbers to make the total equal the target. The initial total may be more or less than the target, so naturally the player must decide by how much to add or subtract, aiming to collect the appropriate numbered boxes to achieve this.

An extra sophistication is added through the use of multiplication or division. If you have, say, a total of 461, then collecting a division box of 3 will not work, because 3 is not a factor of 461, and this information is promptly displayed,, however if the player first collects a figure of minus 2, bringing the total down to 459, and then collects a division box of 3, the total will be divided.

To make the game more interesting, there are holes in some platforms which must be avoided. If the painter should fall through he is stunned and has to start again. On the right of the screen, a bucket is slowly hauled up on a rope. When the bucket reaches the top of the screen the given time limit is over and a life is lost. There are three lives. The player may select which level to start play on, between levels 1 to 12, although the game will continue beyond level 12. On the higher levels the game gets progressively more difficult, with a wider range of numbers and mathematical operations, and a stricter time limit. One of the user-friendly aspects to the game is that each life is started after pressing SPACE. This gives the player time to look at the target and total figures as well as the numbered boxes, and try to plan a route to success.

Number Painter combines an educational aspect with game skills in an interesting and enjoyable manner. The graphics are large, clear and bright, with neat animation and some amusing between level sequences. The game itself is quite challenging and should prove involving for younger players, although whether the average 14 year-old will think so is a matter open to speculation. At £4.95, it represents good value both as a game and as an educational tool to hone mental arithmetic and for use with calculators.

COMMENTS

Control keys: A/Z up/down, O/P left/right, B to SPACE to paint a number
Joystick: Kempston and Sinclair 2
Keyboard play: good positions and responsive keys with the painter moving continuously
Use of colour: fairly simple, but clearly defined
Graphics: again, simple but clear, with good animation on the painter
Sound: walking effects and spot effects for number painting
Skill levels: 12
Lives: 3
General rating: an entertaining and useful game of mathematics at a sensible price.

ESTIMATOR RACER

Producer: **Sinclair**
Memory required: **16K**
Retail price: **£4.95**
Language: **machine code**
Author: **Psion**
Age group: **5–14 years**

This is another mathematical game in which the player is expected to be able to recognise whether the answer to a sum is correct or not. It takes place on a 3D race track, where the player drives a small car along the road, which has four lanes. At the bottom of each lane is a figure, and below the figure blocks a question block which contains two figures which are being added, subtracted, multiplied or divided. The idea is to steer the car into the lane whose figure most nearly approximates the answer to the sum being asked at the bottom. Added excitement comes in the form of oil slicks and rocks, which keep you on your toes. At each half-kilometre a warning beep sounds and if the car is not in the correct lane it will be stalled. If you are in the corrct lane the sum will change and require a lane change.

There are four levels of play, which refer more to the game play than the sums, and four cars to choose from. Hazards include oil slicks which might make the car skid and mix up the answers, rocks on the road and a night driving sequence.

Before play starts you can select addition, subtraction, both, multiplication, division or both. Scoring is by time taken (an on-screen clock keeps track) and average speed.

CRITICISM

The general concept of *Estimator Racer* is appealing, but in play the game lacks. The range of sums is impressive, and there's no doubt that estimation skills could be honed up fairly well with this program, but possibly the lack of playing content is against it. The 3D race track is interesting at first but will soon become repetetive, as there are really very few features to hold the excitement, beyond trying to match the figures. Children who may have seen their elder kin playing games like *Chequered Flag* will feel cheated that there are no bends to drive around. In short, a good idea that has turned out as a rather boring game.



Mathematics on the race track don't figure as well as they might in Sinclair's ESTIMATOR RACER.

COMMENTS

Control keys: A/Z up and accelerate/down and brake, O/P left right
Joystick: Sinclair 2
Keyboard play: fairly responsive
Use of colour: average
Graphics: average
Sound: continuous, not brilliant
Skill levels: 4
General rating: good idea, shame about the game.

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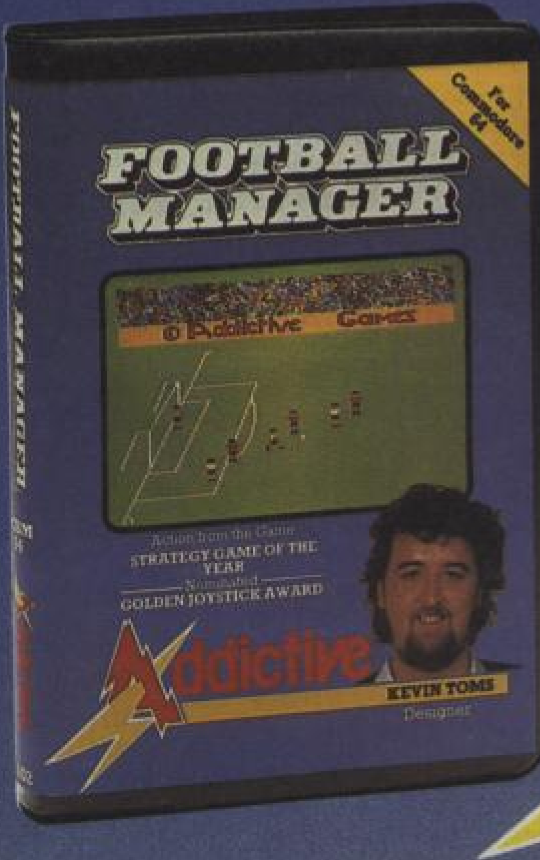
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Reviews

HUNCHBACK II

Producer: **Ocean**
Memory required: **48K**
Retail price: **£6.95**
Language: **machine code**
Author: Paul Owens, Mike Webb, scenic graphics by Dave Thorpe



The splendid loading screen from HUNCHBACK II.

CRASH got smartly wrapped over the knuckles by the success of *Hunchback*, as we hadn't thought it *that* marvellous. But because of its popularity, the follow up, *Hunchback 2*, is bound to do well. Subtitled *Quasimodo's Revenge*, you again play the endearing hunchback in a quest to rescue Esmerelda who has once again been imprisoned in the Castle Stronghold (poor old thing). There are seven screens to battle through, each quite different from the others, and indeed the game style is quite different from its predecessor.

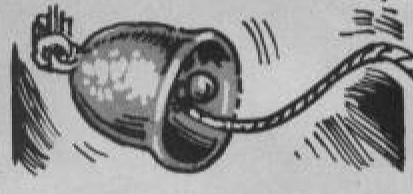
On the first six screens Quasimodo must collect bonus bells to reach the following screen. On the first, a simple platform arrangement, the bells are set into the floor and walking over them will collect them. Each level of the platform screen is connected by the bell ropes at either end which go up and down. Hazards include arrows and fireballs which must be ducked or jumped, while on subsequent screens there are bats, birds and axes. On the seventh screen, which is inside the castle belfry, the working mechanisms of the clock threaten him. On completing the seventh screen, the game returns to screen one with an increased level of difficulty.

CRITICISM

● 'Two months ago I was looking forward to the new version of *Hunchback, Hunchback 2*, and it has since arrived, only a couple of months late — not bad for the software industry. Hoping that *Hunchback 2* would be a damned sight more playable than its predecessor, I eagerly loaded it. I was met by a rather jolly synthesised tune. It soon became apparent that *Hunchback 2* was not any easier than the first one, if anything a lot more difficult; although the first screen is fairly kind and quite playable. Moving onto the second screen though — extremely difficult, and it took me quite a bit of time to work out how to achieve my objective. I have since played this game for a couple of hours, not getting past the second screen. It isn't the tricky timing needed as in the first one but more so that all the moving items on the screen are linked together and you only have the slightest chance on some occasions to collect a bell. I wish Ocean could have had two or three skill levels to ease you into the game, and this would have made it much more playable, and definitely more addictive. Those who liked *Hunchback* will probably take to *Hunchback 2* very quickly, and seeing as the graphics are quite a bit better, this will add to the qualities of an exceptionally difficult game.'

● *'Sequels never seem to be as good as originals, but* Hunchback 2 *has more than surpassed the original. The graphics are great and Quasi is a much better character than he was in* Hunchback. *In fact (I know Spectrum owners hate hearing about the Commodore but) the Spectrum version of this game is, in my opinion, much the better of the two, and it's a tougher game to play as well. It's very playable and addictive, but it is the sort of game that's more fun to play in groups where you've got others cheering you on! The seventh screen is particularly good as far as graphics go, using greys in a way seldom seen on the Spectrum, and (once again the dreaded words) it actually looks like the sort of graphics you might expect to see on the CBM 64. As it gets increasingly difficult I think this game will have a pretty long life in terms of appeal.'*

● 'Straight off, this is so much better than *Hunchback* because the graphics are better and more fun. Also there's a great deal more to do than leaping to the right constantly while jumping in different rhythms because the screens are quite varied, demanding a different skill each time. That said, this is still primarily a jumping, dodging and timing game that should keep players on their toes for ages. It combines enough clever elements to make you want to go on, and the frustration level can be quite high, especially when you are finally about to get off a damned screen and a slip of timing ruins everything. One thing has to be said about the Hall of Fame entry system which scrolls across the bottom using the joystick — it is simple, fast and one of the best I've seen. I think this is a good game which ought to do very well.'



COMMENTS

Control keys: user definable, four needed with fire for jump
Joystick: Kempston, Protek, AGF, Sinclair 2
Keyboard play: very responsive, simple to control
Use of colour: very good, clean and bright
Graphics: large, smooth, fast and varied
Sound: good 'synthesised' tune, otherwise not very much during play
Skill levels: 1
Lives: 5
Screens: 7
General rating: very playable, addictive and an improvement on the original, good value.

Use of computer	87%
Graphics	89%
Playability	83%
Getting started	89%
Addictive qualities	80%
Value for money	83%
Overall	**85%**

The starting screen of Ocean's HUNCHBACK II. It looks deceptively easy, but proves to be a meanly timed game.



Much later on, and Quasimodo is still leaping, clinging and ducking as Esmerelda cries for help and awaits her rescue.





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GIFT FROM THE GODS



We have 50 copies of Ocean's newest game which CRASH readers can win by answering some incredibly tough questions!

But first, a word from our Sponsor!

There's a full review of *GIFT FROM THE GODS* in this issue, so one or two of the questions can be answered by gleaning info from there. As to the rest, you'll have to be armed with an intensively detailed knowledge of the ancient world in which this game is set.

GIFT FROM THE GODS **normally retails at £9.95, so this competition represents good value if you should win a copy, especially as the game itself is pretty big and involving. The plot follows the trials and tribulations of Orestes as he attempts to solve the riddle of the Guardians' Chamber, avoid some nasty (and very animated) monsters and protect his dear sister from their evil mother. It's the very stuff of drama!**

To win a copy of *GIFT FROM THE GODS*, all you have to do is answer the questions below and send them in on a postcard (or the back of a sealed envelope) to *GIFT FROM THE GODS COMPETITION, CRASH MAGAZINE, PO BOX 10, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE SY8 1DB* to arrive no later than first post *Friday 22nd February*. The first 50 correct entries pulled from the bag will each receive a copy of GIFT FROM THE GODS for the 48K Spectrum.

GIFT FROM THE GODS COMPETITION

Modern Questions

1. What is the company name of the programming team who wrote Gift From The Gods?
2. John Gibson is one of the programming team, what famous software house did he work for before?
3. What's so special about the way the joystick is used in Gift From The Gods? (We're looking for one descriptive word).

Ancient Questions

4. What relation is Orestes to Electra?
5. Orestes is given the sword of the ancient hero Ajax who received it from Hector after which war, **A)** The Punic War, **B)** The Trojan War, **C)** The Battle of Philippi?
6. Euclid was a well known Greek figure, was he **A)** a sculptor, **B)** a poet, **C)** a mathemtician, **D)** a warrior?
7. Who was the chief God of the ancient Greeks, was it **A)** Hermes, **B)** Apollo, **C)** Zeus, **D)** Hades?
8. An Oracle is **A)** a soothsayer, **B)** a wine goblet, **C)** a small wattle boat?
9. In the game Orestes is given the 'Tears of Icarus'. How did Icarus meet his death, **A)** by being stabbed in the back, **B)** by swallowing poison, **C)** by crying himself to death, **D)** by falling from a great height.

ZONE 00

Producer: **Allanson Computing**
Memory required: **48K**
Retail price: **£5.50**
Language: **machine code**

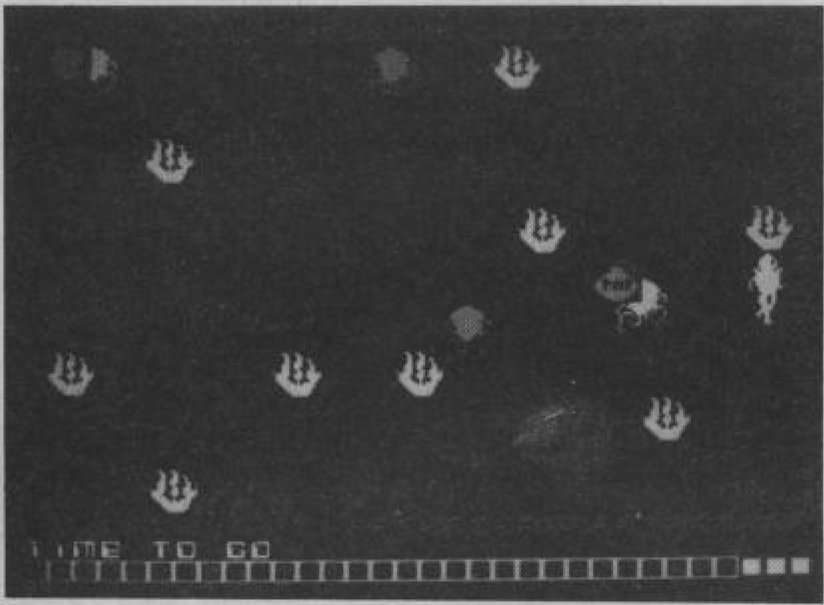
Allanson claim that *Zone 00*, unlike many others, is not based on a single theme. You battle your way through a fantasy world opposed by enemies from every facet of human experience, both real and imaginary, all assembled in the computer matrix that is the zone.

There are 20 stages starting with octopi pursuing you around wrecks of ships on the sea-bed. As you progress there are different nasties in different settings. Basically each screen has objects dotted around that act as obstacles, like the shipwrecks on screen one. The nasties perambulate around randomly chasing you. You drop bombs behind you and then detonate them when a nasty passes over a bomb. To progress to the next stage you must kill off a set number of enemies before the severe time limit runs out.

Allanson believe that *Zone 00* is the most challenging arcade game produced for the Spectrum so far and doubt that anyone will be able to master the game before Christmas 1985. A promotional competition is being run with the game with 'Master of the Zone' T-shirts and a telephone hotline to keep prospective winners informed of competition progress.

CRITICISM

● 'I don't really know what to class this game as. I don't think I've ever seen a game quite like it before. I didn't really enjoy playing it mainly because the bomb control was so hard to use and unresponsive, and because there was not much to do in the game itself. My other main nag was with the sound which was okay for about 30 seconds, but after that it started to drive me up the wall. Apart from that, I found *Zone 00* to be quite playable and strangely addictive. Each screen is different to the last, I liked the graphics which were quite well animated even if they did tend to disappear when they were close to something else.'



A typical screen from Allanson's ZONE 00 sees our hero battling against wrecked sailing ships and octopusses (or—pi if you prefer).

● *'It must be said that this is a strange game, the object isn't difficult whatsoever, as a matter of fact anyone could do it. The difficult part comes in because you are playing against the clock and with only one life. The cassette inlay doesn't give you any really useful information at all to be able to base your play against, so at first you blindly drop bombs and try to kill your oponents. I played the game for half an hour without getting off screen one, I just got totally frustrated and annoyed with the game. But then I completed screen one and quite a few of the following screens came very easily. The only element that comes up against you once you have got used to the game is the intense time factor and only this makes the game difficult. Graphics, to say the least, are different, quite interesting, but don't really add much to the game. I get the feeling that I should not recommend this game to anyone even though prizes are given for completion or partial completion as an incentive. I am sure I can think of many other games for the price that are worth buying instead of this.'*

● 'I was reminded of Sinclair's *Eric and the Floaters*, a similar idea to this, using remotely detonated bombs to kill off monsters. *Zone 00* is much simpler, however. The graphic characters are often familiar, Sinclair's own Horace among them. The main interest comes from seeing a different screen, but the idea remains firmly the same throughout, and oddly, later screens seem easier. It is a bit of a cheat sometimes, because on those screens that are very open (not many obstacles to create a maze path) the random movement of the aliens means that the chances of blowing them all up before the time limit runs out is remote. So luck and not skill plays the main part of this slightly unusual but generally uninteresting game.'

COMMENTS

Control keys: 5/V up/down, 1/2 left/right and 6 to drop bomb and explode
Joystick: none
Keyboard play: quite responsive but not at all well laid out
Use of colour: varied from screen to screen, but rather uninteresting within each screen



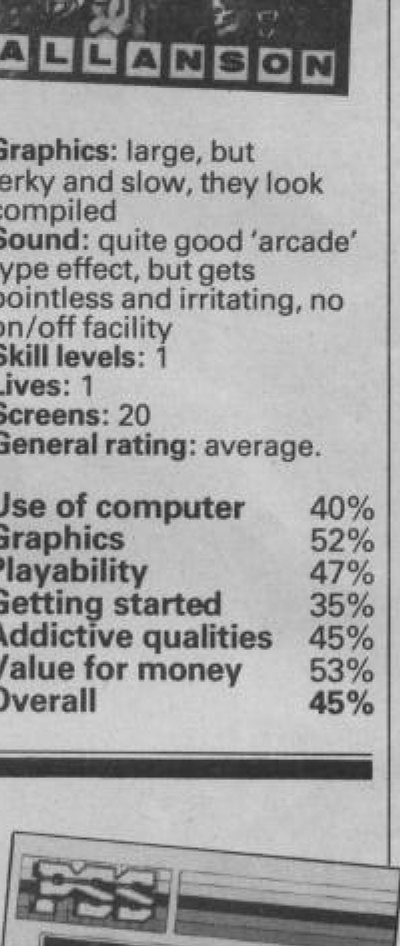
Graphics: large, but jerky and slow, they look compiled
Sound: quite good 'arcade' type effect, but gets pointless and irritating, no on/off facility
Skill levels: 1
Lives: 1
Screens: 20
General rating: average.

Use of computer	40%
Graphics	52%
Playability	47%
Getting started	35%
Addictive qualities	45%
Value for money	53%
Overall	**45%**

XAVIOR

Producer: **P.S.S.**
Memory required: **48K**
Retail price: **£5.95**
Language: **machine code**
Author: **Paul Hutchinson**

Yes, it's down to you again, this time you really are the very last survivor, in fact you are XAVIOR! If you think XAVIOR sounds a bit like SAVIOUR, you might be right, because that's what you are, the saviour of your race. In a vast subterranean complex beneath your planet the constituent sections of the DNA which, when combined, form the vital chain that enables your people to thrive once more, have been scattered about. The pieces take the shape of small red wiggles. In some rooms there are blue globes to be collected which allow you to open doors and fire. Fire power is essential! The complex is huge, 4096 rooms to be precise, and they are inhabited by as many as 256 different apparitions which materialise as soon as you enter a room. Contact with any of these apparitions is fatal. As the DNA pieces are collected, they are automatically linked up. On collection of the final piece of DNA the genetic chamber has its doors revealed and you must enter, destroying the nasties will ensure the survival of your race.

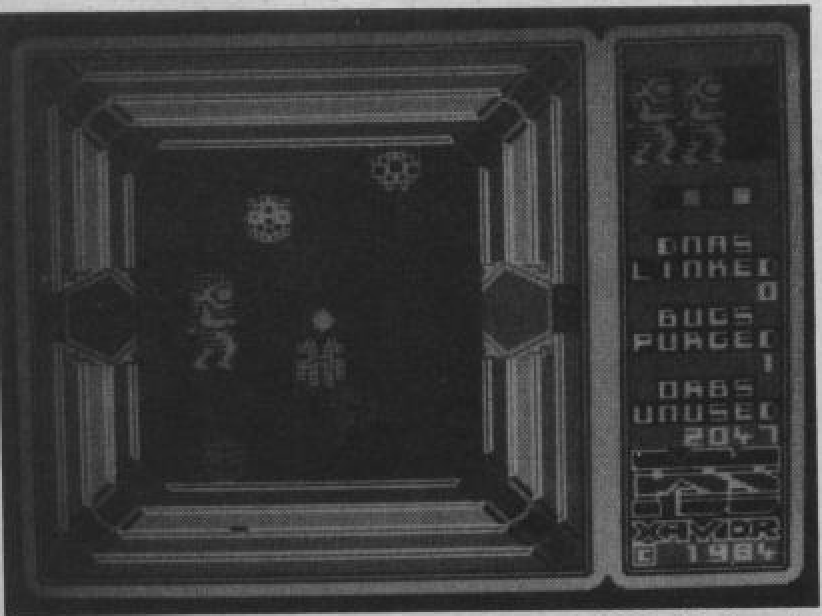


The screen is split up into a square playing area, with the

walls of the rooms taking up quite a bit of the space. The doors are set into these walls, blue before exit is permitted, left black after opening. Once a room has been cleared of monsters it remains so, allowing free access to it again. On the right is the status board which informs you of how many 'clones' you have remaining, whether an orb has been collected and what you are allowed to do with it, DNA pieces linked, bugs purged and the amount of unused orbs.

because the clone is so large you tend to have difficulty in moving about avoiding creatures. This is no bad thing, as without this the game would be boring. It's very well presented but there is not enough variation.'

● *'Different to say the least. Xavior, who looks like a Red Indian to me although he's actually yellow (but no coward), has to collect DNA to save his race — where have I heard this before? This game is played in a small part of the screen, why*



One of the thousands of identical rooms from XAVIOUR with the red indian-like hero fighting his way through tons of materialisations.

CRITICISM

● 'Xavior with its 4096 rooms plus 256 creatures sounds like it will keep you occupied for hours. After playing it I decided that due to the general routine of rooms and monsters all being very similar, the game was not very addictive. The graphics were smooth, but

I don't know, perhaps they have tried to confuse the players with many moving objects in a small area. Xavior is quite well animated — fairly detailed as are all the graphics in this game. Everything moves very well at a nice pace. However, the game seems to lack in content, just mere shoot em up skills won't sell a game these days, high content is just as important. I must say that either the game is very simple (that is, not easy playing) or I must have missed a very large point of the game. A good, but confusing shoot em up, watch the tune — it drives you mad!'

● 'There seems to have been a drive recently to provide us with 'complex' games that contain thousands of locations. While this sounds impressive and can even be fun, the problem with such games is that the locations are all very similar if not identical. Such is certainly the case with *Xavior*, where there is little to distinguish between one room and another. That apart, the game is quite playable, for despite the size of the moving characters and the tiny playing space, the program is very kind in allowing you to hit aliens easily and does not kill you off at the merest contact. Good looking graphics, annoying sound, a reasonable shoot em up, but in the end a bit boring as well.'

COMMENTS

Control keys: user definable, four direction and a fire needed
Joystick: Kempston, Sinclair 2, AGF, Protek
Keyboard play: very responsive
Use of colour: good, very colourful
Graphics: fairly smooth, very large and detailed
Sound: spot effects with tunes
Skill levels: 1
Lives: 3
Screens: 4096
Special features: Currah Microspeech
General rating: above average to good.

Use of computer	79%
Graphics	74%
Playability	67%
Getting started	70%
Addictive qualities	64%
Value for money	71%
Overall	**71%**



BATTLE CARS

Producer: **Games Workshop**
Memory required: **48K**
Retail price: **£7.95**
Language: **Machine code**
Author: **SLUG**

SLUG is a programmers cooperative and *Battlecars* is from an idea by Games Workshops' Ian Livingstone, ideas man, incidentally, behind the Fighting Fantasy Books and Domark's *Eureka!*. It is sub-titled The Game of Deadly Driving and hovers between being a strategy game and an arcade game for one or two players.

After loading you are faced with a menu offering 1 Circuit, 2 Autodrome, 3 Slug City, 4 Car Design and 5 Load Car Code. There are three different arenas for battle, selections 1 to 3. As a solo player you can build up your skills by racing against the computer controlled car on the circuit and then test yourself in combat against the computer in the Autodrome. The third option is the real battle, a fight to the death against another real player in any of the battlegrounds.

In this game you can design your own cars and fill them with the weapons of your choice. Each weapon pod can take only one type of weapon but carry a certain number of rounds. Machine guns can take up to 16 rounds, Shells can take up to 8 rounds, Missiles up to 4, Flame throwers up to 4 and Lasers up to 4 rounds. Accuracy depends on range, since the target is always at the centre of a 15 degree field of fire and the shot can go anywhere within that angle, so the nearer you are, the more likely it is you will score a hit. If you have a gunnery computer on board, the angle of fire is reduced to about 10 degrees, increasing accuracy.

Each car has six steering functions, four fire functions and throttle and brake, so the box comes complete with a keyboard overlay for each player. Steering is in 45 or 90 degree increments left and right as well as drift to the left and right. Firing, depending on the weapon selected, is



The two-screen layout of BATTLECARS, a mechano-role playing game for one or two players. Here we are in the city (map bottom centre).

controlled by firing either the left, right or rear weapons pod. The amount of pods you have and the weapons carried depends on the type of car you choose. This is done through the Car Selection menu. A choice of eight cars is available incorporating three engine sizes, chassis sizes and weights, wheel sizes and other varied factors. At this time, the type of car for the computer can be selected, and it's wise to cheat at first!

Both cars may be selected as computer controlled, in which case you will be given a demonstration.

The Circuit is loaded with the start of the program, but the other two scenarios each have their own program to be loaded when you are ready. Another program, the Designer, will allow you to redesign your car, with an allocation of money that has to take into account the cost of weapons as well. It's the ultimate Mad Max game!

The screen display is split into two halves, left and right. At the top of each half is the playing area square for each car. This scrolls in all directions with the individual car, showing details of landscape or cityscape through which you are driving. When the two combatants are alongside each other, the two screens show the same view. Below the playing area is a diagramatic view of each car showing weapons and damage, which 'toggle' between the two every time you fire or are hit. It can be manually toggled whenever you wish however. There is also a fuel gauge, and refuelling can be done at any of the garages you may find, although while this is taking place you may be very vulnerable to atack. Between the two players' displays is a radar map showing the relative positions of both combatants.

Battlecars contains many strategical elements which must be taken into account, and add greatly to the possible complexities of the game.

CRITICISM

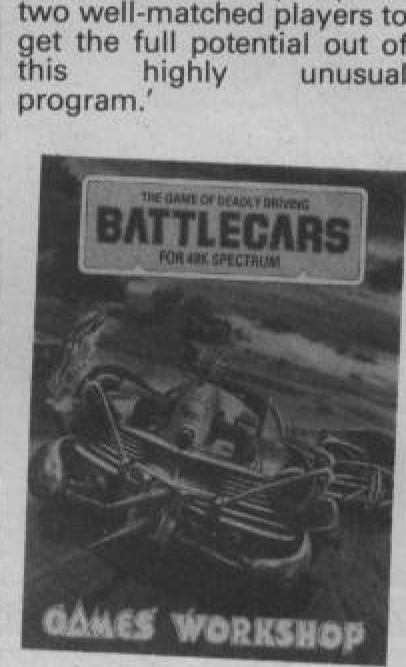
● 'This is a game of skill and strategy which I feel has great potential, although I wonder whether Games Workshop have done enough with it. The graphics are good, although the sound is poor. It might have been logical to assume that after designing a car, the one you played with would look like it, but this isn't the case. The game itself is pretty good, but it didn't quite live up to my expectations because there are too many control keys, especially for steering. And by having so many facilities on the car meant that the game was a jack of all and master of none.'

● *'This must be one of the wierdest games I have played for an exceptionally long while. I cannot really say that I understand it even after playing it for an hour. Okay, yeah, we all know what to do with the computer's car — give as much damage to it as possible. This does pose some tricky problems, seeing as the computer controlled car is a computer car it usually thinks ten times as fast as you do, but being a computer he lacks cunning and skill. You can choose your car or design a car, but whatever, you still need to have your wits about you. I must state that there is an odd steering arrangement. Why on earth didn't they have two keys which could continuously control the car? An excellent example of this is Ultimate's* Tranz-Am. *Although, saying this, the keys which are provided do have a very good response but doesn't quite make up for the odd arrangement. There doesn't seem to be much going on in this game, which is not to say that there's a lack of content though. One thing I missed is that there doesn't seem to be any clear cut winner as defined by the computer with the exception of a quit button, which stops play at that point in time and tells you how much damage is done to each car, the one with the least amount being the winner. I am sure I've missed something in this game, and I am sure there is more to it, but I just can't get into the game at all. Perhaps after four or five hours play, objectives, skill factors will become crystal clear.*

● 'It isn't all that easy to review *Battlecars* in a short space because this is a complicated game, not so much to play, but to get into. At first it seems complex, then when you play it seems easier than you thought, then you realise that it is the sort of game to play over a long period, reshuffling strategies and settling on the type of car and weapons you prefer best. Playing against the computer is only half of it, because the computer is a somewhat unthinking opponent, good, but unoriginal. Playing in two makes the real difference and turns *Battlecars* into a thrilling experience in which you can eventually become quite lost. The unnecessarily complicated steering is a handicap at first, although you do become used to it, and then fairly sophisticated movements are possible. Perhaps the biggest drawback is that it really requires two well-matched players to get the full potential out of this highly unusual program.'

The car designer screen from BATTLECARS.





COMMENTS

Control keys: Q and U/R and P 90 left/right, 1 and 7/4 and 0 45 left/right, 2 and 8/3 and 9 drift left/right A,S,Z,W/J,K, M,I for weapons pods
Joystick: you must be kidding!
Keyboard play: complicated but very responsive
Use of colour: not much
Graphics: generally small, though detailed
Sound: not much, firing spot effects
Skill levels: depends on play selection
Lives: percentage of damage
Screens: three scenarios
General rating: mixed opinions, definitely unusual, and a good game for strategy enthusiasts who like some arcade skills thrown in.

Use of computer	52%
Graphics	65%
Playability	67%
Getting started	70%
Addictive qualities	69%
Value for money	70%
Overall	**66%**


Bristles
JOYSTICK REQUIRED
Bristles, outrageous graphics, dazzling game play, testing quick reactions, concentration, logic and strategy, it is mind (and joy-stick) boggling!! Featuring Sex-Select, you can choose either boy or girl painters.
Bristles features different game screens and skill levels for each building. Scramble to paint the entire building while avoiding the smart Bucket Chucker, Dumb Buckets and flying Half-Pints. Take the lifts, climb the stairs and watch out for the caretaker's daughter; she puts her hand prints all over the place! Then there's prizes, candy canes, "invisible paint" . . .
With fully animated characters, (music) sound effects, multiple screens and beautiful graphics, you can't help but want to add Bristles to your collection of Spectrum games.
48 LEVELS
For The Sinclair Spectrum 48k £7·95
Statesoft
State Soft Limited Business & Technology Centre Bessemer Drive
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MATCH DAY

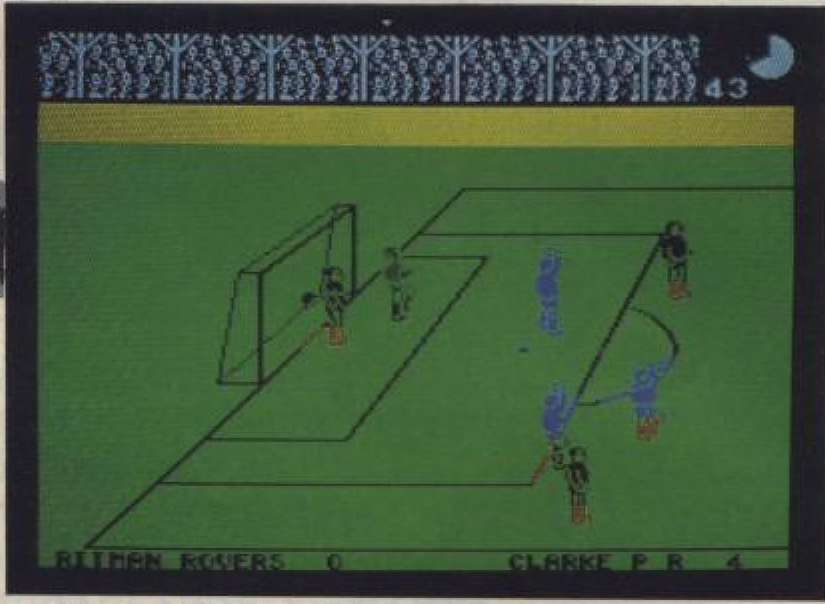
Producer: **Ocean**
Memory required: **48K**
Retail price: **£7.95**
Language: **machine code**
Author: **Jon Ritman & Chris Clarke**

Match Day is a 3D football game played on a marked--out soccer pitch and features animated players and a bouncing ball. It may be played by one against the computer or by up to eight players in a knock-out competition using a 2-joystick interface or the keyboard.

The pitch is viewed from above and to one side in perspective, the screen scrolling continuously to centre the action. Each team has its own coloured strip, and the players are operated by the computer on a logical basis, mimicking soccer tactics. The player controls the character in control of the ball, or the one who is in the best position to tackle. Most soccer skills such as tackling, dribbling, passing, heading, blocking or trapping. The controlled player is indicated on screen by the fact that his socks change colour to match the rest of his strip.

Set pieces such as corners, centres and goal kicks can be performed with three levels of kicking strength.

After loading the game you can set the time of play for 5, 15 or 45 minutes each way (extra time is automatic if there is a draw). At this time it is also possible to select on of the three skill levels (for solo games against the computer). Names of teams may be altered to suit the players' inclinations. On top of that it is possible to alter the team colours, the background playing colours and that of the border to suit individual taste. The main menu options are readily accessible between each game and are even offered at half time. The colour change menu takes you to a screen with all the elements displayed in large characters so you can see the effect clearly before deciding.



The game comes accompanied by a 12 page instruction sheet with comprehensive details of both the features in the game and how to play it.

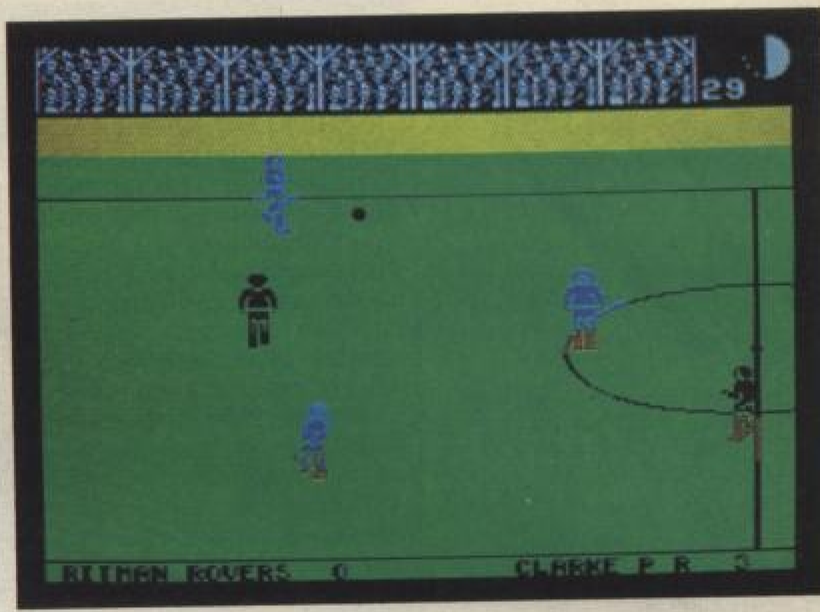
CRITICISM

● *'Match Day* is Ocean's answer to Commodore's *International Soccer* and (besides having simpler

graphics) this new Spectrum version is much the better. Offering superb options, including fully redefinable keys, it is a much more playable game. The graphics are good and there aren't many attribute problems, which there were in *World Cup Football*. This game 'sports' many of *International Soccer*'s features like a bouncing ball and diving goalies (which you can control for once). *Match Day* must be the definitive football game for the Spectrum and after seeing it, it puts all other Spectrum football games in the shade. This is the one to get!'

● *'Ocean's* Match day *is by far the best football game about. There are others about which are quite good, but this one has the best graphics, playability and atmosphere. Due to its playability it is surely going to be as big a seller as* Daley Thompson's Decathlon. Match Day *is very authentic in actual game play, but leaves out several less desirable elements like crowd violence and fouls (mind you on occasions the players seemed to be giving each other some nasty looks). The switching from player to player that is controlled as the ball enters that area, is very good. Dribbling, passing and other essential realistic features are all well done. Ocean have produced a great sports simulation which I would strongly recommend to everyone.'*

● 'There are few attempts made at active football games. Earlier attempts have been quite good but none have been as good as this one. So much detail has been packed into this game and it has an almost foolproof front end. Graphics are of a nice size and well drawn, detailed. The animation is pretty good although the way the players run is a bit odd in the sense that they seem to put their feet down very definitely and almost in a robotic-like manner, but this doesn't spoil the character of the game. Such is the detail that attention has been paid to every point, for





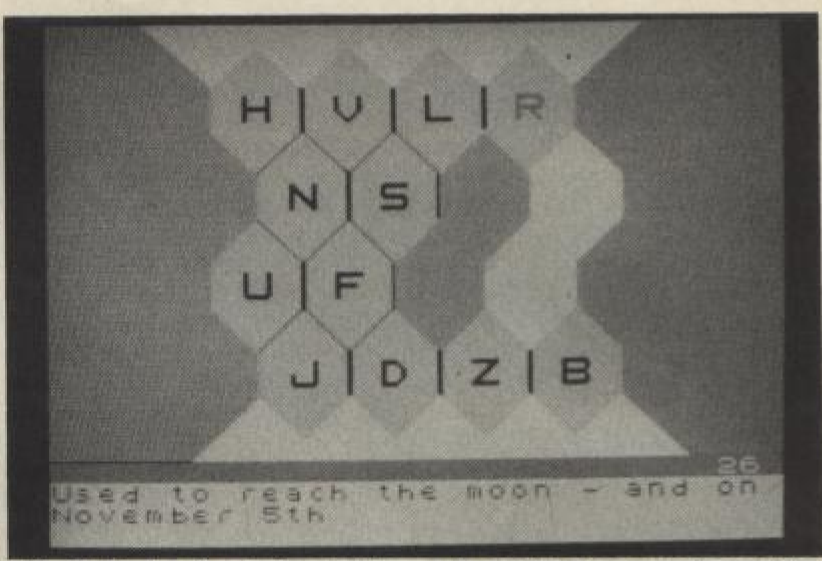


example the crowd constantly move up and down in different rhythms, and there is a shadow of the ball which increases and decreases in size depending on what height the ball is at which all adds to the 3D illusion. One feature I liked about this game is that you can alter the playing colours, not only on the players but also on the border and the pitch, a very useful facility. This game will probably appeal most to footballing fans but nevertheless a very difficult game to win.'

COMMENTS

Control keys: user definable
Joystick: almost any via UDK, but would have to be Sinclair 2 for two-handed play, unless keys programmed separately
Keyboard play: very responsive, and programming system makes for easy control of players
Use of colour: excellent with definable characteristics
Graphics: very good, realistic animation from all characters and everything is large and clear
Sound: good 'Match of the Day' tune, but not much during play except whistle sounds
Skill levels: 3 in solo game, otherwise depends on skill of real opponents
General rating: a first rate sports simulation that requires several skills and offers plenty of playing options. Excellent value for money.

Use of computer	88%
Graphics	84%
Playability	86%
Getting started	91%
Addictive qualities	85%
Value for money	81%
Overall	**86%**



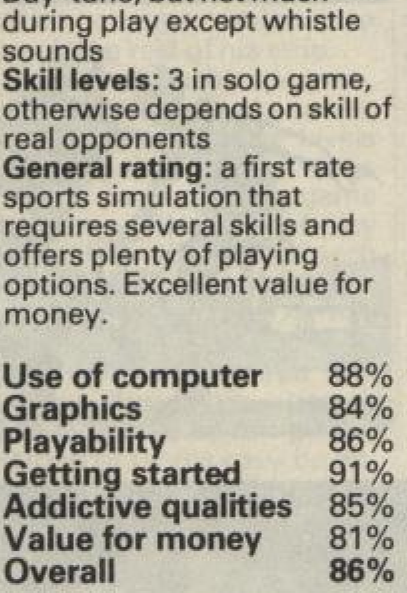
I don't think we're giving much away by saying the answer's ROCKET — the official version of BLOCKBUSTERS.

BLOCK-BUSTERS

Producer: Macsen Software
Memory required: 48K
Retail price: £7.95
Language: machine code

Not long ago we reviewed a game based on the well known Central TV quiz show, which was released by Compusound. Unfortunately this was not properly licensed and Compusound have been forced to withdraw it. The version under review here is the official one. It is not the same program as that released by Compusound.

The game is surely well enough known not to have to describe it in detail. Basically two players attempt to beat each other across a matrix of hexagons in a 4 by 4 shape.



Each hexagon contains a letter of the alphabet. The players take turns to select a letter, at which point a question appears at the bottom of the screen, the initial letter of the answer being the selected hexagon letter. Either player may interrupt and answer it against the time limit. A successful answer results in the hexagon being coloured in the player's colour. The first to blaze a trail right across the playing space from top to bottom or from either side is the winner.

A set of questions is automatically loaded with the game, but there are other question sets on tape which will be loaded if requested. Players may select from nine difficulty levels and on a series of games from 1 to 9.

CRITICISM

● 'It's best to play this game with only two people in the room as the others can't resist joining in and they always know how to spell better than me and always help my opponent. The graphics are as good as you would expect on this type of game and you can't hear the sound for the other people yelling out answers. This is quite a good game that tests your spelling and vocabulary. It turns out to be quite addictive, although it rather depends on who you're playing with.'

● *'This has to be one of the most fun and addictive educational games on the market where the entire family can join in, but in only two separate groups. It does seem to have a massive vocabulary, and I've yet to see a repeat question. This does have a distinct advantage in giving the player a considerable variety of questions. Screen layout couldn't really be better, everything is precise, bold and clear. Overall, if you enjoy the TV series you'll love this game. Well worth the money.'*

● 'Here we have an example of a game where the computer is a very suitable medium. The game is good, not because of the program (which seems like a very good one) but because the original game idea as seen on TV is enjoyable. The result is a compelling home computer game where the utilitarian graphics work well and the sufficiency of questions make for plenty of playability. Good family entertainment value, with the added advantage over the TV programme of not having that horrible little man in your sitting room.'

COMMENTS

Control keys: A and L for interrupt keys, general inputs
Keyboard play: responsive, fast response time
Use of colour: sensible rather than exciting
Graphics: hardly applies
Sound: good tune, entry beeps and warning signal
Skill levels: 9
General rating: excellent family entertainment and a good two-player quiz game, good value.

Use of computer	80%
Graphics	N/A
Playability	88%
Getting started	78%
Addictive qualities	83%
Value for money	80%
Overall	**82%**

Reviews

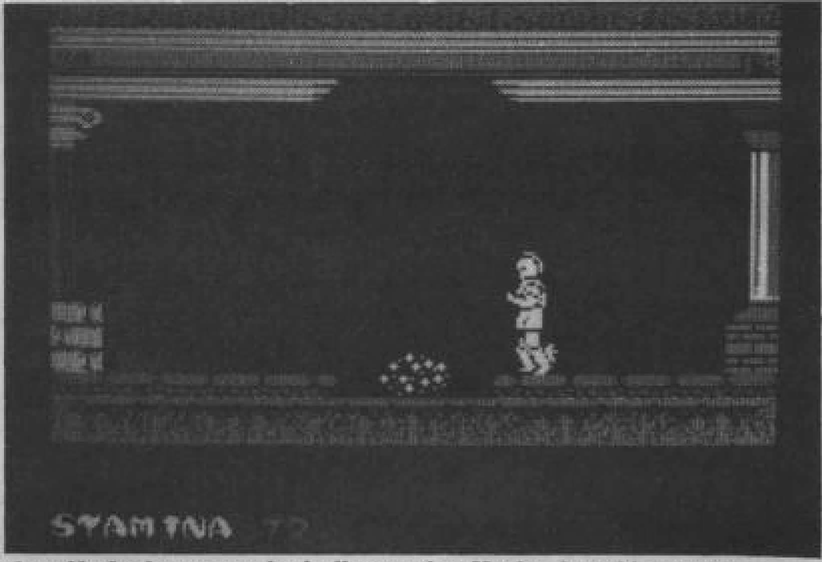
GIFT FROM THE GODS

Producer: **Ocean**
Memory required: **48K**
Retail price: **£9.95**
Language: **machine code**
Author: **Denton Designs**

One of the happier notes in our article last month on the crash of Imagine, was that megagame programmer John Gibson was working with a brand new software company called Denton Designs, largely financed by Ocean. *Gift from the Gods* is their first game (they are now busy on Frankie Goes to Hollywood), and the team who created it is John Gibson, Karen Davies and Steve Crane (graphics), systems designer Kenny Everitt and graphics artist Ally Noble.

Gift from the Gods is a multi-screen strategy/adventure game which is joystick driven in a rather novel way. More of that later, first the storyline. Set in the Palace of Mycena in Ancient Greece, it follows the trials and tribulations of Orestes who, under the directions of the Gods Zeus and Apollo, must avenge the murder of his father, King Agememnon. Orestes must fulfill his destiny by trial in the Labyrinth beneath the palace and find the solution to the puzzle, or perish in the attempt.

Hidden in 16 special rooms are objects, known as Euclidian shapes, geometric designs based on triangles, circles and squares; six of which, when correctly positioned in the Guardian's Chamber, reveal the exit. Orestes has some help from his sister Electra, who has been imprisoned in the Labyrinth, and she can guide him to where the shapes are hidden, but Orestes has to decide himself what shapes he must take to the Guardian's Chamber. Illusionary creatures created by the Demi-Gods try to sap Orestes' strength, but in certain rooms, life-giving water drips from the roof, replenishing energy and

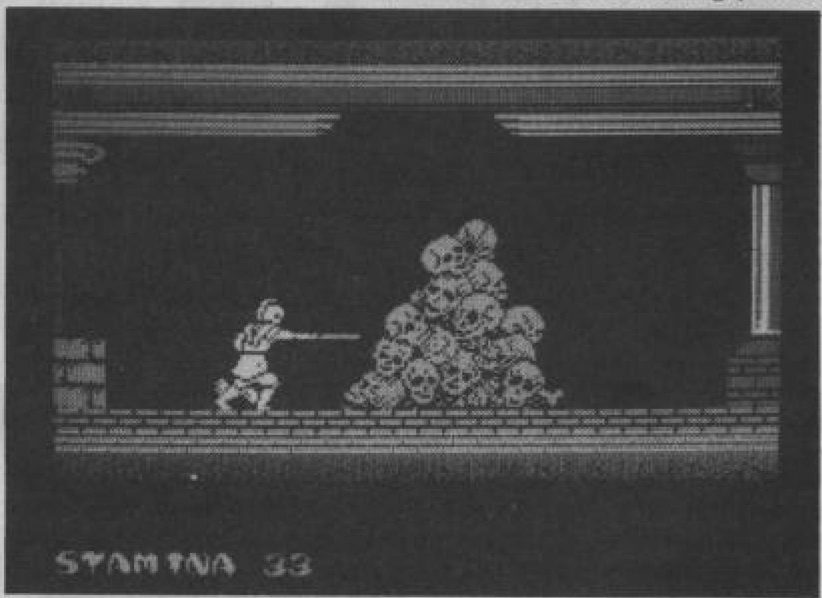


A puff of talcom powder indicates that Mother has this way been.

stamina. The Demi-Gods have also created illusory Euclidian shapes as which sit beside the real ones, and although these do not fool Electra, she isn't always around to help. The other problem is his mother, Clytaemnestra, who has learned of his task and has enetered the labyrinth to kill Electra.

Orestes is able to walk or fly and protect himself with a sword. All these functions would normally require loads of controls, but *Gift from the Gods* has an innovative 'intelligent' joystick feature, which effectively 'knows' what you want to do next. Whether it really 'knows' is another matter, but depending on the circumstances you are able to walk, fly or fight all from the four directions of the joystick.

The screen display is elegantly simple. Each room of the labyrinth is decorated in appropriate Greek style. It is possible to walk or fly vertically or horizontally between linked rooms. As Orestes disappears from view, there is a fast scroll to the next room into which he then appears. Some rooms are blocked by purple walls, through which he cannot go. Others have doors in them, and when positioned correctly, Orestes may move through them either into other rooms or into the secret hiding places



A monstrous pile of snake-filled skulls, leers at Orestes.

In a side room, Orestes comes across some Euclidian shapes, but which is the real one, and which are the illusions?



of the Euclidian shapes. The only other detail is the stamina figure and a scrolling message line where Electra, Apollo and Zeus may talk. The labyrinth is a confusing place but Orestes may take some small comfort from the seven Tears of Icarus which he carries. Dropped sensibly these can help mark his passage, but wicked Clytaemnestra is likely to pick them up if she comes across them.

CRITICISM

● 'I haven't seen a game like *Gift from the Gods* before, with the possible exception that graphically and sometimes in feeling there is a touch of *Alchemist* to it. However, where *Alchemist* was pretty easy and shallow, *Gift from the Gods* is more detailed and complex. The game is simple enough, but getting anywhere with it is another matter. I liked the pace, which is slow, but in a thoughtful way, and I liked the way the complexities of the game grew as I played it. At first it seems there is little to do except walk or fly from room to room, but the labyrinth is huge and confusing. It's a game to map as you go along or you'll soon lose your way. The shapes you have to collect are often false, illusions created by the Demi-Gods to confuse you further, and the reason for attacking the monsters, which can usually be avoided, becomes apparent. By destroying the illusion, the illusory shapes are also temporarily destroyed. The graphics are excellent, especially the character of Orestes, who moves convincingly — I especially liked the way he adopts a Greek tragedian's pose after stunning himself. The joystick/keyboard selection menu is not accessible after choice, a drawback which is thoughtfully mentioned for once on the inlay card instructions. *Gift from the Gods* is a highly unusual game, definitely more adventure/strategy than arcade, but you can have fun with the monsters and the dual action sword.'

● 'Gift from the Gods *is without doubt the best game that has ever come out with Imagine connected somewhere to it. The graphics are very good and the animation*

of the various monsters and yourself is excellent. The game is colourful and the overall presentation is marvellous. Gift from the Gods *is fun to play and, offering challenges to players of all sorts — you don't have to be an arcade wiz to get from room to room, but you have to be quite good at games if you want to complete the game. The only thing that really lets the game down is that it's a bit expensive, though it does come in a very attractive box. Overall,* Gift from the Gods *is a very good game at a steep price.'*



With winged boots, Orestes takes to the air thankful for his GIFT FROM THE GODS.

● 'This somewhat stylish arcade/adventure has more of the adventure than the arcade in it. The market for arcade/adventures seem to have expanded a lot recently, whether or not this has been due to the pre-Christmas rush to get products onto the market, so there seem to have been more, or whether it's due to a genuine desire for different and more complex games, I don't know. Finding the Guardian's Chamber is the first trick. It isn't easy. When you do find it, you realise its refreshing in more than the trees that line its sides, it also replenishes all your stamina — a bit quicker than standing under a dripping roof filling up. There are six receptacles in there, all waiting for the six shapes you are going to bring — hopefully. Finding your way back to it when you've collected the first shape with Electra's help is the second trick! Your mum is not really seen, and the murder of Electra at her hands, should you let that happen through inattention, is mercifully done out of sight. The only way you know that she's slinking around the place is by the puffs of talcum powder she trails behind her — extremely sinister! *Gift from the Gods* has a curiously mesmeric feel to it which is hard to describe and I would unreservedly recommend it to anyone, were it not for the high price. If you can afford it, get it.'

COMMENTS

Control keys: top row – fire, second row – up, third row – down, alternate keys bottom row left/right
Joystick; Sinclair 2, Kempston, Cursor
Keyboard play: very responsive, with sophisticated control possible, clever use of fire to stop movement, pick up/drop and fight. Eight directional movement
Use of colour: excellent
Graphics: large, smooth with excellent detail and imagination used, first rate scrolling
Sound: very little really beyond the odd spot effect
Skill levels: 1
Lives: 100 points of stamina — you need it all
Screens: what do you expect — it's a labyrinth!
General rating: an original, enjoyable game with a wide range of playing options, generally excellent, pity about the higher price.

Use of computer	90%
Graphics	91%
Playability	81%
Getting started	85%
Addictive qualities	81%
Value for money	75%
Overall	**84%**

KERRASH! N·E·W·S



Moving from the Liverpool Pleasure Dome to the Manchester Program Room, it's FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD, soon to be starring in a new OCEAN game by DENTON DESIGNS.

FRANKIE GOES TO OCEAN

In the good old days the word 'crossover' was used when 'underground' disco music crossed over from the dance charts to the main stream chart. Today, everyone seems to be crossing over from everywhere. Chart toppers **Frankie Goes to Hollywood** are among the latest and have placed their reputation in the hands of **Denton Designs** who are developing the game *Frankie* for **Ocean**.

The aggressive marketing techniques of Frankie's creative producers, **ZTT** has been much in evidence and, together with Island Records, they set up the deal with Ocean's David Ward, with the three companies sharing the revenue from sales of the game. (Oh and Frankie Goes to Hollywood get a cut somewhere along the line. Frankie's Svenghali, **Paul Morley** of ZTT, has apparently contributed to many of the initial ideas for what Ocean describes as a new concept in entertainment publishing. No details yet on what the game will be like except that it's described as a 'Spectacular', and is scheduled for an early Spring release at a price of £9.95. Better get in an order now for what must be the inevitable t-shirts bearing a legend like, 'Frankie Says No More Shoot Em Ups'.



With the horrors of Imagine behind him and no longer having to struggle with the completion of BANDERSNATCH, programmer John Gibson can relax with the other members of his team at DENTON DESIGNS. The team are at work on a new program for Ocean about the pop group FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD, as well as other projects for BEYOND. The picture shows (left to right) JOHN GIBSON, graphics specialist KAREN DAVIES, STEVE CANE — also graphics, systems designer KENNY EVERITT, computer graphics artist ALLY NOBLE, and on the TV screen, hero of their latest game GIFT FROM THE GODS, Orestes thrusting his sword at a pile of screaming skulls.

MIND SCREAM

The film *Alien* became something of a cult almost as soon as it was released. Now Spectrum owners can entertain themselves with a new strategy game based upon the movie. *Alien* from **Argus Press Software** is the latest in their 'Mind Games' series. The game represents a breakthrough in programming techniques, says Argus. This is the first program of its kind where the player has to relate not just to coloured blobs on the screen, but to *people*. In order to succeed you have to learn how to manage people, understand people and predict how people will behave.

Inside the space tug Nostromo you have seven distinct personalities and a cat. Your task is to command the crew and prevent the Alien from reaching Earth. The game opens at the point in the film where the Alien has killed one crew member by tastefully hatching from the victim's chest. The crew member attacked changes each game. The Alien can be killed by driving it through the airlock or by blowing up the Nostromo. You can escape with three crew members on the shuttle providing nothing is left alive aboard the Nostromo.

The programmer is **Paul Clansey** who comes from Liverpool and is a self--



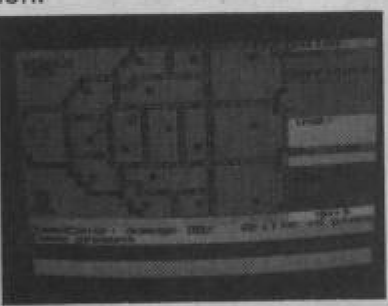
ALIEN programmer PAUL CLANSEY gets a helping hand.

admitted *Alien* fan. He has tried to remain faithful to the spirit of the film, whilst allowing the player to alter the film's outcome dramatically in the game through gameplay. *Alien* is joystick

MOON CRESTA



driven (or via the keyboard). The Nostromo has three levels into which you can move any of the crew. These are controlled one at a time while others are completing their tasks, although one of them is a robot who wants to help the Alien. The game comes in a large style video case with a 16 page booklet including stills from the film and a guide to the story and game, and it costs £8.99. We'll have a review next issue of the Spectrum version.



One of the game screens from the new ARGUS game ALIEN.



NEW ARCADE FROM INCENTIVE

Since the successful hit game *Splat*, **Incentive Software** have concentrated on adventure games for the Spectrum like the *Ket Trilogy* or strategy/simulations like *Millionaire*. But Incentive's managing director **Ian Andrew** says that more emphasis will be placed on arcade games again in 1985. Ian himself is something of an arcade freak, living in a house full of arcade video machines and pinball machines.

The first such is a Spectrum version of an arcade original which has been a great favourite, and yet has never been done on the Spectrum. It is *Moon Cresta*, a furious and difficult shoot em up. *Moon Cresta* is officially licenced from Nichibutsu (Arcade Game) and should be released in March at around £6.95.

In some senses *Moon Cresta* is a Galaxo-variant in which aliens swoop down on your space ship in lethal patterns, firing as they come. A between-waves sequence requires you to dock your fighter craft with the main body of your ship while both sections are moving about in space. A sneak preview at the CRASH offices revealed a Spectrum version with true to the original graphics and tunes and levels of play which should suit everyone right up to fiendishly difficult. Incentive will be running a competition in conjunction with the game for the winner to receive an original Moon Cresta arcade video machine.

Of the following release, Ian is more cautious and won't say any more at the moment other than it will be a highly original arcade game in much the same way that *Splat* was original.

W H SMITH CREDIT

W H Smith is now offering credit facilities to customers buying computers at its High Street Computer Shops.

Credit is available for purchases of computers, software and accessories to the total retail value of between £400 and £2,000, 10% of which must be paid as a deposit at the time of purchase. Products wanted by customers on credit need to include an item of computer hardware. Repayments may be made over 12, 14 or 36 months. The scheme includes all the 50 plus Computer Shops excepting the two at Heathrow Airport, but is not available at W H Smith computer departments.

THE ONE THAT ALMOST GOT AWAY

Shortly before the Christmas break **Paul Dyer** of **Fantasy Software** presented a specially made 'Backpackers' clock to **Bob Hamilton**, author of Fantasy's latest success, the *Backpackers Guide to the Universe*, at a celebration in Cheltenham held to mark the game that nearly didn't make it.

Explaining the reasons for the celebration, Paul said, 'We have built our reputation on producing only a small number of very good games. But to maintain that reputation we have to deliver on time.

'We are well aware of the Christmas market in the home computer software industry, and to miss it could have set us back months. Everything conspired against us with *Backpackers*. Technical problems with writing the game, meant that Bob quite literally worked flat out for days on end, going without food or sleep to get it finished, even though he was ill at the time. At the last minute, the supplier of the vinyl cases let us down, which meant switching to different packaging and all changes to artwork and printing which that entailed.'

Although *Backpacker* has done very well in the charts, having sold a claimed 23,000 copies in its first month, Paul and Bob are unable to relax as parts two and three of *Backpackers* are in production for releases during 85.



BOB HAMILTON (left) receives his specially built 'Backpackers' clock from PAUL DYER

CAMBRIDGE DISAPPEARS

Cambridge Computing best known for their software programmable joystick interface, have ceased trading. There had been rumours earlier in the year that the company was in financial trouble after sales of their interface had virtually dried up. Development of the neat SLOMO device for altering playing speeds of computer games, came too late to save their sinking fortunes. The company has gone into Voluntary Liquidation.

THE LAST SQUAWK

Currah Computer Components, manufacturers of the well known speech device the **Currah Microspeech** unit, have also run into financial trouble and been taken into Receivership. First indications of a problem in the company, which claimed tens of thousands of sales for the Spectrum unit within the first six months, came when dealers found themselves being invoiced by Currah's suppliers of electronic components instead of direct by Currah themselves. Shortly before Christmas, we discovered that Receivers had been appointed to handle the company's affairs, although in the first days the Currah receptionists were not admitting to the fact as they are required to do. Currah had been developing a number of follow-up products to the Microspeech unit — the Microslot motherboard has been on sale for several months — but now the future of these products is in doubt, although several hardware manufacturers are known to be interested in acquiring the rights to them.

SCOPE GOING STRONG

We published a letter three issues ago from a reader warning that **ISP**, the people marketing the graphic utility *Scope*, had gone bust. This was true. However the program is still available and going strong, according to **CodeWriter Ltd** of Basingstoke, who not only took over the marketing rights of *Scope*, but also ISP's consumer liabilities. **Graham Lomax** of CodeWriter (part of the CodeWriter Corporation of Chicago) told us that they have acquired all the ISP product range. They have also been fulfilling orders left by ISP, but it has taken time to go through the outstanding orders. By this time all ISP customers still waiting for product should have either received it or have been sent a communication. Delays have also been occasioned by the time it takes for a liquidator to release paperwork and stock, but that this was completed about ten weeks ago. CodeWriter have also taken up the ISP User Club, which has meant changing the club membership cards to include the new details. CodeWriter can be reached through PO Box 33, Basingstoke, Hants RG24 0UG, but are presently relocating their offices some thirty miles away in Berkshire.

SWORDS AND SORCERY

For those fascinated by statistics, **Mike Simpson**, the P.S.S. programmer responsible for the development of *Swords and Sorcery* has announced that the program contains 86 monsters, 635 locations, an 800 word dictionary, almost 2,000 objects and in excess of four million ways to be insulted.

Mike, who has already spent over 18 months in the planning and development of the program, has also revealed that it will be run in Real Time, be fully menu driven and the player will be able to control weapons during combat sequences.

THE INCREDIBLE HULK was on hand to give his colleague SPIDERMAN a helping hand when ADVENTURE INTERNATIONAL delivered the first batch of tapes for their new release to the headquarters of Microdealer UK in Welwyn Garden City. SPIDERMAN is another Scott Adams adventure with stunning graphics for the 48K Spectrum retailing at £9.95.



GETTING AWAY

Continuing on their departure route from text-only adventures **Level 9** have released a new graphical adventure called *Emerald isle* with over 150 different pictures. The plot concerns the pilot of a light aircraft who has been forced to parachute down to a lush tropical paradise after a meeting with something strange in the Bermuda Triangle. Unlike most Level 9 adventures, the problem is not survival but how to get away from the lovely island. This one's priced at £6.95

Swords and Sorcery is available for the 48K Spectrum at £9.95, but the lady in the photograph is only available on the Amstrad version.



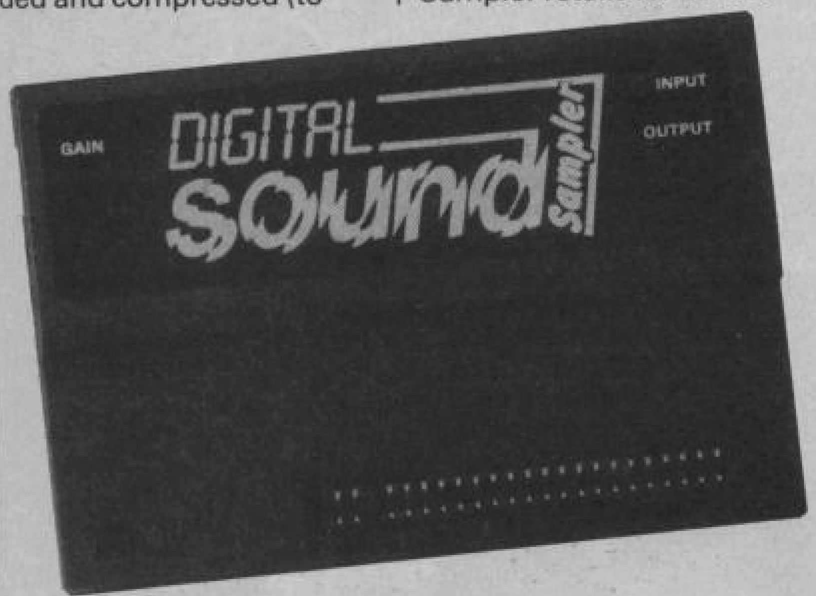
DIGITAL SOUND

Datel Electronics have announced the release of the **Digital Sound Sampler** for the Spectrum computer. The slimline device plugs into the user port and comes complete with a software package to facilitate a host of sampling techniques. The D.S.S. allows the Spectrum user to record digitally into Spectrum memory, any sound like a voice, drums, instruments etc., and then play this captured sound back with almost limitless variations. These include conventional playback, forwards, backwards, ascending-descending pitch, expanded and compressed (to make 'Donald Duck' or 'Darth Vader' type sounds) with echo - endlessly looped. Further software for 'on screen' voice-prints and pitch analysis, together with a program to incorporate effects into your own games, is also included in the software package.

Datel say that they feel strongly that the end user has been previously exploited as they see similar products with no more technical sophistication than their own selling at unbelievably high prices.

Datel claim that by using the D.S.S., an entire piano concerto can be written by recording just one piano note!

The Digital Sound Sampler retails for £49.99.



FOR INCREASED STORAGE

Many Spectrum owners have recognised that the hallowed Microdrive has its drawbacks, although it still remains the cheapest method of expanded memory storage and fast access. But for those who wish to really expand the use of their Spectrum, there are a number of superior disk drives around. One of the latest is also British and comes from Thurnall Electronics. For the asking price of £219.95 (including VAT and delivery), Thurnall offer a standard Hitachi disk drive with the popular 3 inch ½-Megabyte disks. The drive is compatible with all known Spectrum software, with Microdrives, Interface 1, all known printer drivers and joysticks. It comes supplied in one box with all necessary leads, manual, disk with introductory programs and a money back guarantee if not satisfied. It is available direct from **Thurnall Electronics, 95 Liverpool Road, Cadishead, Manchester, telephone 061–775 7922.**



JET SET WILLY'S SINGE

Jet Set Willy almost met his match when a fire broke out at the Bear Brand estate where **Software Projects** have their headquarters on the outskirts of Liverpool immediately before Christmas. Fears that Software Projects had gone up in a puff of smoke were laid to rest with a phone call. The fire had broken out in an adjacent unit, part of a kitchen furniture factory, and Software Projects were in no real danger, although thick smoke forced all the staff to evacuate their premises. SP's managing director, **Alan Maton** told us that the smoke had made a mess of things and their telephone system was not operating properly for some days, but stock, masters and computer equipment were all safe. The cause of the fire has not been firmly established, but was believed to have been started in the electrical wiring of the kitchen factory unit.

DANGEROUS GAME

The Advertising Standards Authority have upheld complaints made by two members of the public over the advertisement published in CRASH for **Silversoft**'s *Worse Things Happen At Sea*. The advertisement was headlined, FOR ADDED REALISM PLAY THIS STANDING IN THE BATH'. The complainants considered that in the context of a game likely to appeal to children, the advertisement encouraged a disregard for safety. It is, of course, considered dangerous to take any electrical appliance into a bath full of water. Perhaps the answer is for Sir Clive to be the first with a gas or steam operated Spectrum. No action has been taken against Silversoft as the advertisement was withdrawn on request, although too late to avoid being printed in the December issue of CRASH.

MODEMS AND LINK UPS

Unicom's Modem is now in full production after experiencing some delays, but Marketing Director **Mark Simon** is confident that they can meet all January's orders.

The Unicom Modem features auto baud rate sensor, auto dial, auto redial, full and half duplex and comes complete with power supply, leads and manual at a cost of £49.95 excluding VAT. Software for the Spectrum is expected by mid-January.

Modems have been very expensive until recent low cost models began to appear, and although general reliability of information transfer is still uncertain due to telephone line interference, the use of modems is increasing. **British Telecom** have recently launched a trial service which will give modem users something constructive to do with their units. The trial service has actually been launched by *Your Computer* magazine supported by British Telecom East. By simply making a phone call, Spectrum owners who possess a modem will be able to download a selection of software programs published in *Your Computer*, and save a good deal of laborious keying in.

One of the programs which is immediately available is a communications package entitled *Dialsoft*, which will enable users to communicate with each other via the keyboard and transfer data or programs. British Telecom say that a 6K byte program should take about one minute with a 1200 bit/second modem. No membership or subscription fees are required.

Details of the telephone numbers to call, and for the programs currently available for downloading, are now available on a new recorded information service — Microline — which can be accessed on **Colchester 8068 (STD code 0206).**

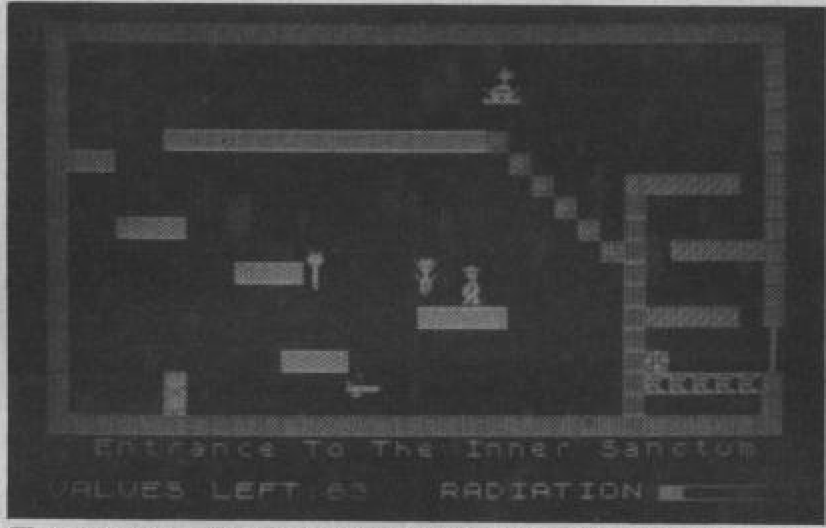
FARENHEIT 3000

Producer: **Softstone**
Memory required: **48K**
Retail price: **£5.95**
Language: **machine code**
Author: Timothy Williams

Timothy Williams is probably best known for his first commercial game *Odyssey 1*, which was reviewed in the very first issue of CRASH. That was produced by Perfection Software, now marketed by Softstone. *Farenheit 3000* is set in a reactor, Dragon Reactor to be precise. What's happened is that the reactor has gone critical and is about to 'meltdown'. Visions of atomic bombs and mushroom clouds pass through the minds of the local residents. Luckily, the worst that could happen is an enormous radiation leakage that could wipe out half of the South Coast of England. The coast is in a panic, the ceramic coated Uranium Oxide core has reached Farenheit 3000! There is only one chance. You must locate and operate all the pressure valves in order to release the excess pressure and flood the core..

Farenheit 3000 is a 64 screen platform game along the lines of *Jet Set Willy*. The screens are linked vertically and horizontally, each one filled with a different combination of platforms. Anything flashing is lethal with radiation and kills on the spot, except single flashing character blocks which are the valves. Each room is also filled with radioactive hazards, creatures bouncing up and down and from side to side, which are instant death if touched. In some rooms, enormous pools of radioactive water must be jumped. You are provided with a pretty giant leap and an immunity to long drops as long as you do not hit anything lethal on the way down.

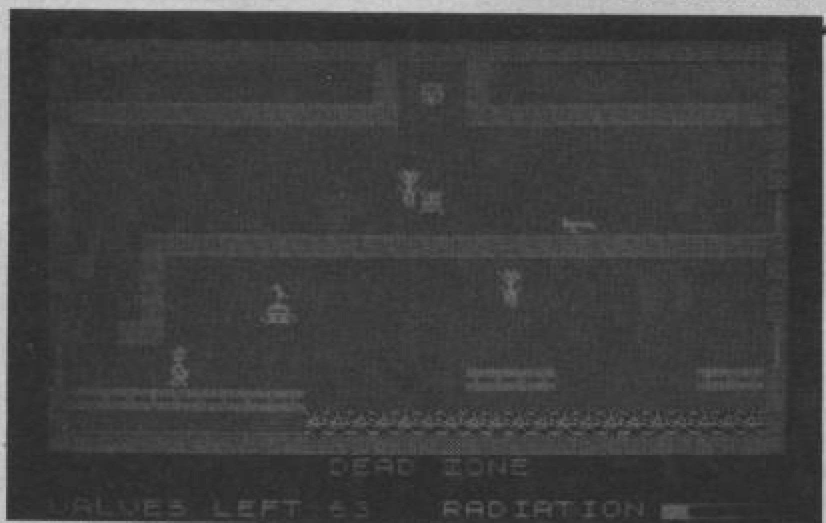
The screen display includes a title for each room in hallowed tradition, as well as telling you how many valves are yet to be done, and what the radiation level is. This latter, acts as a time limit for the game.



The start screen from FARENHEIT 3000, and the first one where you discover how hard this game can be.

CRITICISM

● 'Farenheit 3000 is basically a *JSW* clone, and it follows the same game idea very closely. After playing it I felt that although the graphics were not quite as good, it was harder and had some nice features. Not giving the game away, I will mention but one, 'in the great desert, quick escape' you have only a few seconds before you die. Very intricate jumping is required in many cases. Although this is a *JSW* clone it is still very good and very playable.'



In the Dead Zone, and now the jumping skills are being honed to a fine pitch — or are they?

● *'On the presentation screen it states that the program was written by Tim Williams of Perfection Software. This game is very good – a difficult* Jet Set Willy *style. I wonder why Perfection could not have brought out a game such as this before Softstone apparently took them over? I must stress with this game that you must have a sense of extreme timing, a good TV and a great sense of distance, for all these skill elements come into their own here. This game is not for anybody who is not willing to spend time to realise what the game requires from them. Graphics have an odd colour scheme, some go back to the days of just black and white TV while others are multi-coloured. Animation is a particularly strong point in* Farenheit 3000 *and in quite a few different types of graphics the animation is quite superb. If you found* JSW *too easy, boring and unchallenging, but you liked the type of game, you will most probably enjoy this one.'*

● 'There's certainly plenty of scope for going barmy in this platform jumping game with its 64 excruciatingly hard screens. The game plays heavily on timing jumps to perfection as well as judging distances and taking risks on that last pixel of toe grip. You jump very well, quite high, and another novel aspect becomes apparent – some jumps require a rebound effect to get up onto another platform. This rebound idea can play havoc with you though, bouncing you off into a nasty at the worst possible moment. I'm not sure I enjoyed all the graphics all the while, because some very strange colouring is used. On the whole they are pretty good though and the animated nasties are imaginative and detailed. For me it just slips from master class, but this is certainly no weak-kneed *JSW* copy and it should prove highly popular.'



COMMENTS

Control keys: Q/W left/right and SPACE to jump
Joystick: doesn't need one
Keyboard play: very responsive, and simple to use
Use of colour: uneven, ranging from very good to definitely odd
Graphics: good, smooth, varied and detailed animation
Sound: nice tune and mild spot effects
Skill levels: 1
Lives: N/A – limited by radiation level
Screens: 64
General rating: a very good, hard game with its own features, good value for money.

Use of computer	82%
Graphics	80%
Playability	84%
Getting started	79%
Addictive qualities	79%
Value for money	82%
Overall	**81%**



ULTIMATE PLAY THE GAME
PRESENTS JETMAN
JON RICHARDSON
OUR HERO, THE WALLY JETMAN, HAS SENT AN ALIEN INVASION FLEET THROUGH THE THIRD BLACK HOLE ON THE LEFT.... ...TOWARDS EARTH!!
FWAN! SAY IT ISN'T SO!... SOB
BLEAT!
DRUB DRUB DRUB
WEEP!
OUCH! OUCH! OUCH! O.K.... IT IS NOT SO!
SNIFF!
LOOKIT! MY INFALLABLE COMPUTER SAYS IT ISN'T SO! CAN THIS BE TRUE?
NO I LIED! MY CHIPS HURT
FIRST I HAVE... THEN IT ISN'T... THEN I DID... NOW I HAVEN'T... BWA! ME AM SO CONFUSED...
WELL I'M NOT...
SOB!
THE EARTH IS IN TROUBLE RIGHT? YOU HAVE THE EYE OF OKTUP RIGHT?
THE EARTH IS IN TROUBLE! RIGHT?... YOU HAVE THE EYE OF OKTUP! RIGHT?... EARTH IS THATAWAY! RIGHT?
SNIFF!
AND THE EARTH IS THATAWAY → RIGHT? SO THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY OUT...
SO... WE GO THISAWAY!
RIGHT?
HMMM!
WE GO THISAWAY ← RIGHT?
I KNOW...
LET'S ALL GO THISAWAY!
SHEESH!
HAH!
LOOK OUT
SLAP
AND SO, OUR HERO HEADS OUT INTO UNCHARTED SPACE....
ME GO!
...LUCKILY FOR EARTH!!
BUT...
SAY...! HOW COME A NICE MONSTER LIKE YOU IS TRAVELLING IN A SPACE LIKE THIS?
OH, I WUS KIDNAPPED BY YON' LOONY! BUT DON'T WORRY, MR. OKTUP, AS SOON AS I GET MY PAWS ON SOLID GROUND, I GOIN' TO EAT HIM ALL UP!
WHERE AM I? WHO KNOCKED ME DOWN?
PLUCK
OWYA!
...BUT HE HAS MY FABULOUS EYE, WHICH HE DONE PLUCKED FROM MY HEAD, AND WHICH I GOTTA HAVE BACK!
WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT YOUR EYE THEN? WHAT'S IT DO THAT THE OTHER TWO CAN'T!
GOOD FOR YOU...
HELP! HELP! I AM GOING DIZZY! GET ME UP!
WITH THAT EYE, I CAN...
...SEE INTO THE FUTURE!
I AM GOING TO BE SICK
THEN HOW COME YOU DIDN'T SEE ALL THIS COMIN'?
I WAS LOOKIN' THE OTHER WAY!
BARF
I WONDER WHY THIS, THE EYE OKTUP HAD, IS SO SOUGHT AFTER BY ALL OF MANKIND...?
POOF!
CHOKE
WOW!
WOT HE DOIN'?
HE LOOKIN' INTO THE FUTURE!
NYUK-YUK
WOW!
WHY CAN'T I SEE WOT HE LOOKIN AT THEN?
'COS HE GOT MY EYE, IS WHY!
WOW!
NO WONDER ALL MANKIND HAS SOUGHT THE EYE OF OKTUP FOR SO LONG.....IT'S A MINI-VIDEO PLAYER!
WOW!
WONDER IF I CAN GET GHOSTBUSTERS ON IT!
WOW!
GOSHAROOTIE! JETMAN DOES NOT REALISE THE AWESOME POWER OF THE EYE OF OKTUP HE HOLDS IN HIS HAND!... HE COULD PROBABLY GET CROSSROADS IF HE REALLY TRIED! — HAH!

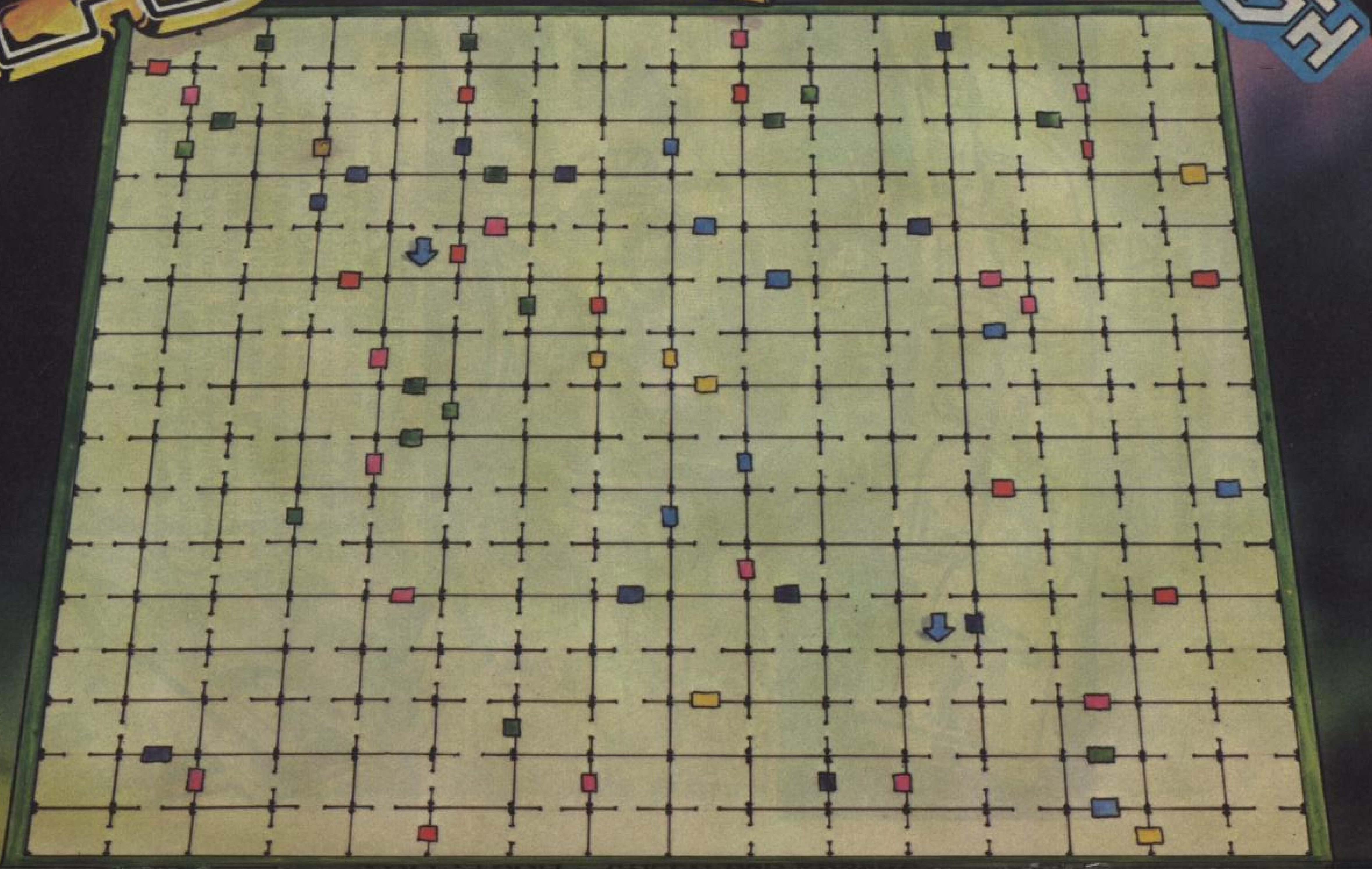
Andrew Beale's PSYTRAXX from THE EDGE is one of the largest maze games around, and has been driving players mad with rage when they get hopelessly lost in its intricacies. In this CRASH exclusive supplement, we bring you the map of PSYTRAXX drawn up by Oliver Frey from top secret documents which fell into our hands, having been removed from a safe deep in The Edge HQ (the boss has a friend who knows a friend of a friend. . . .)

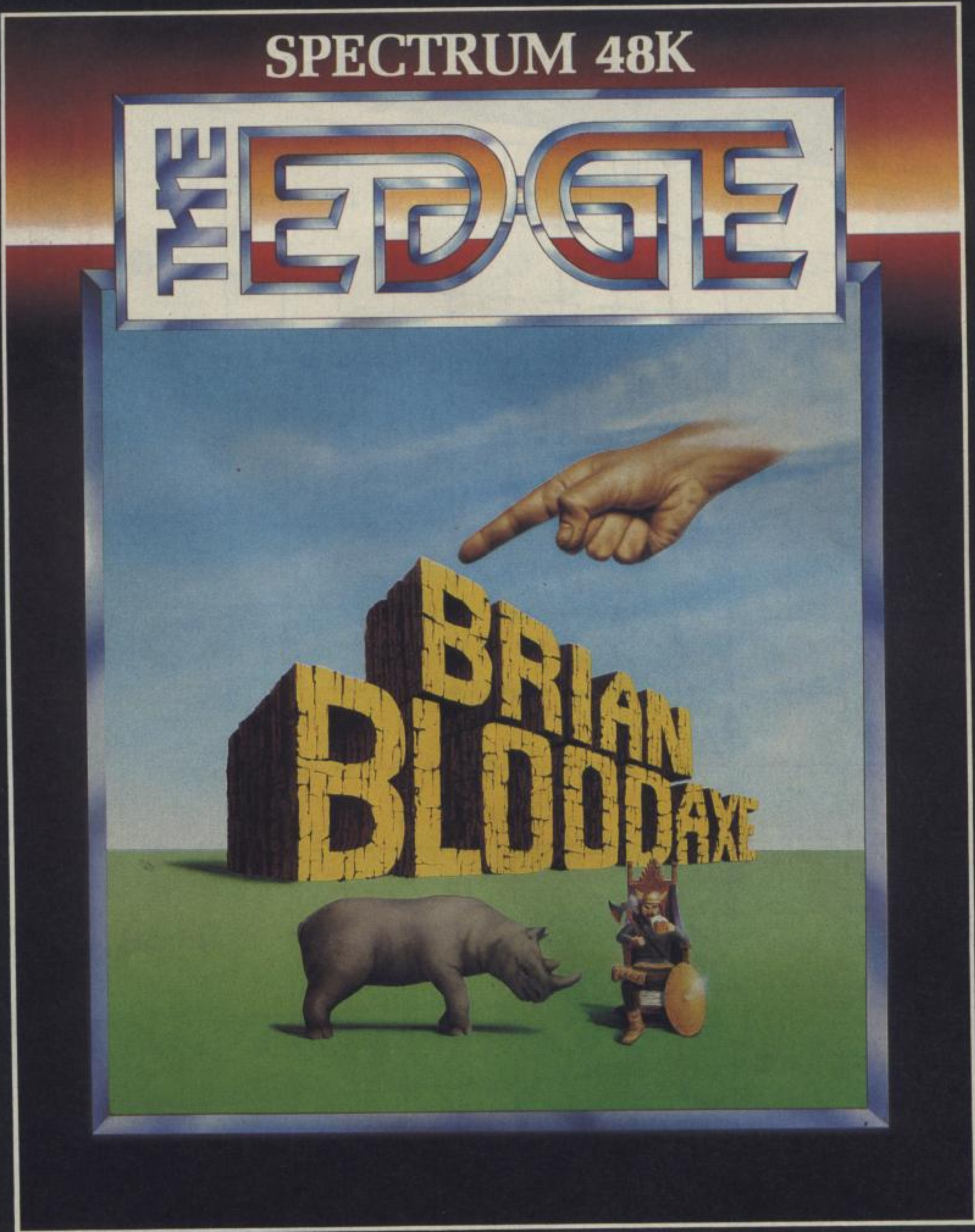


As anyone who has played the game knows, PSYTRAXX is the circuitry of a large robot, the Emperor Robot in fact. This tyrannical monster has tiny psytraxx microdroids inside his circuitry that are supposed to look after him. But one has got free of the evil influence and is running amok through the system, out for revenge on its tyranical master. It is seeking the key program cards to deactivate the force-fields and the Master key-cards to gain access to the Emperor's CPU to destroy him forever. . . .

THE EDGE

PSYTRAXX THE MAP





"What makes Wet Set Jelly sound like a computer game?"

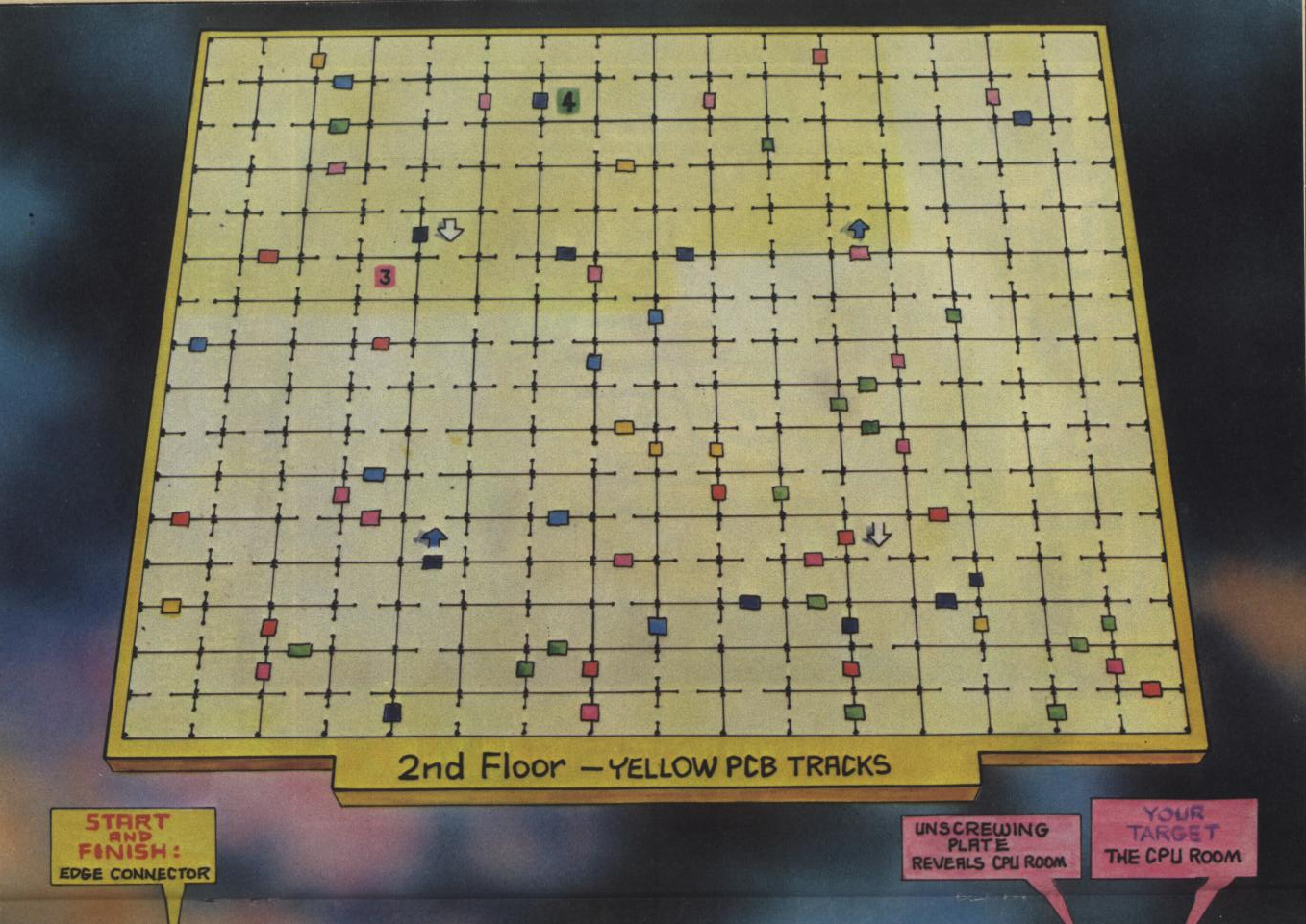
Brian Bloodaxe, with Primary Imbalance

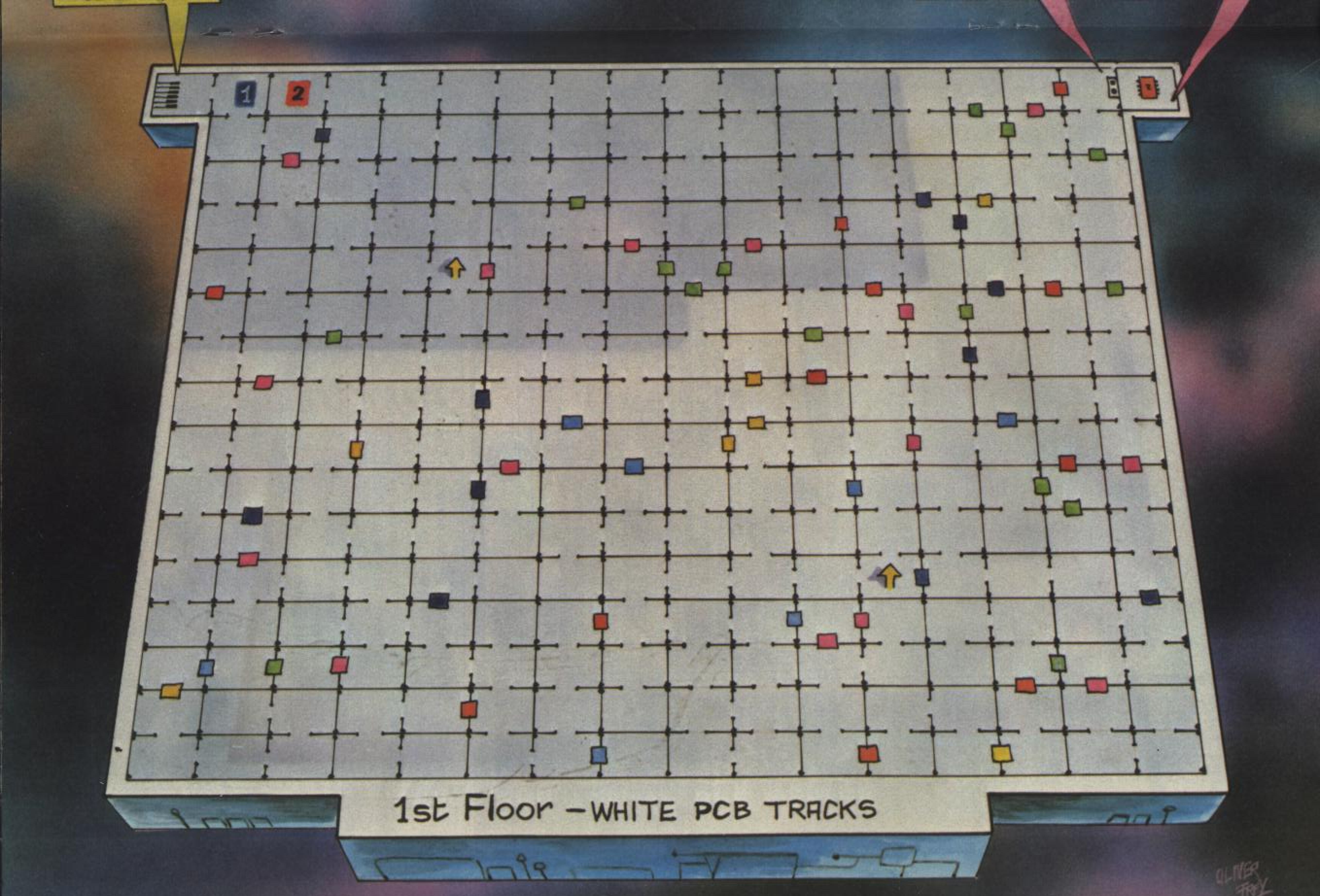
GSH

Spectrum 48K £7.95 on Turbo Cassette

Available from good computer stores everywhere. In case of difficulty in obtaining any of our games please contact us on the numbers below. Authorised dealers can order directly from EMI Distribution.

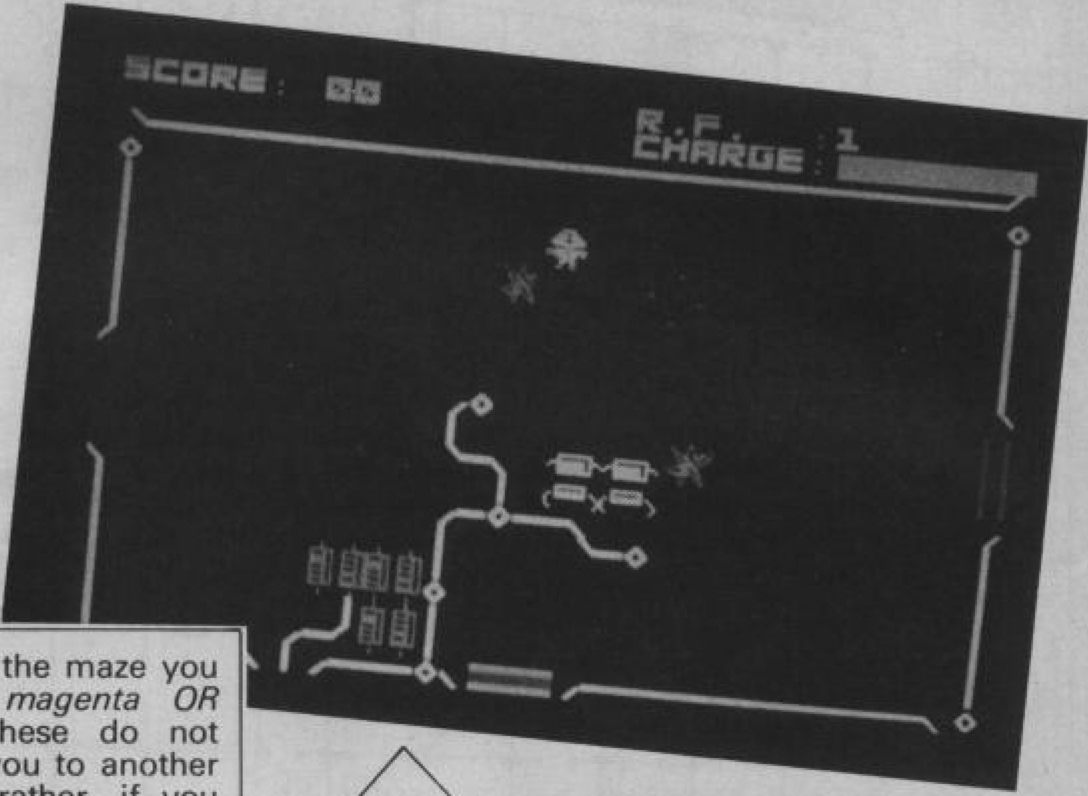
The Edge, 31 Maiden Lane, Covent Garden, London WC2 Tel: 01·240 1422/7877 Telex: 892379


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3
2nd Floor — YELLOW PCB TRACKS
START AND FINISH: EDGE CONNECTOR
UNSCREWING PLATE REVEALS CPU ROOM
YOUR TARGET THE CPU ROOM



1
2
1st Floor – WHITE PCB TRACKS
OLIVER FREY

PSYTRAXX Hints and Tips



JUST ONE OF THE MANY SCREENS IN PSYTRAXX

We're not giving everything away at this stage — just enough to dispel any thoughts that PSYTRAXX is 'just' a very large maze game!

1. To state the obvious, the CPU Room is now revealed to be on the first level where you start the entire game. However, you will have to go right up to the fourth floor PCB before returning to attack the CPU.

2. Your goal is to reach the CPU Room, unscrew the plate which conceals it, blow up the CPU itself (make sure you've plenty of charge — use the small green re-charging modules around the maze), and then make a dash for safety before the entire PCB complex explodes with you inside.

3. Having blown up the CPU make sure that you have already prepared a quick escape route back to the edge connector or you won't have time!

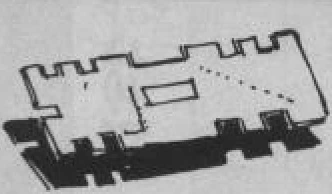
4. Around the maze you will find *magenta OR GATES*. These do not transport you to another floor but rather, if you touch them, they will repel you in the direction of the CPU room — thus giving you an idea of your orientation and the location of the CPU.

5. On some floors you'll find other useful items. For instance on two floors you'll find friendly microdroids like yourself which if connected with give you extra lives.

There's more, but we'll not tell you just yet whether there are secret passages, magic objects, snow shoes, frustrated CRASH reviewers in hidden cupboards, etc . . . yet.

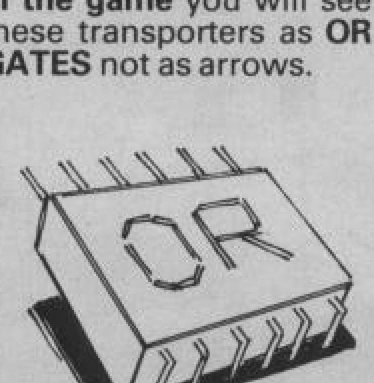


PSYTRAXX The Map

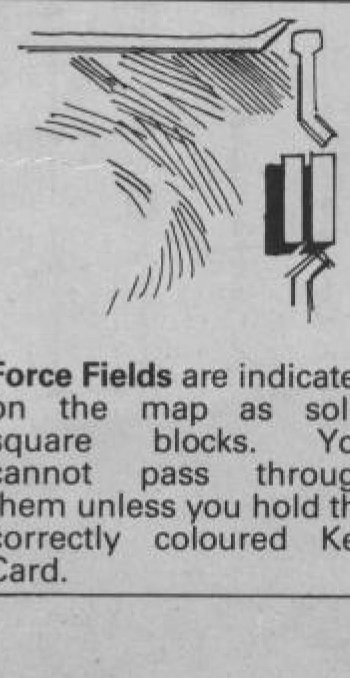


Key Plates
Each 'Key Plate' is coloured and each will de-activate the force-field of its own colour only. There are sixe types: dark blue, red, magenta, green, cyan and yellow (they are numbered 1 to 6). There are some keys on each floor of the PCB:
PCB floor 1 — Keys 1 and 2
PCB floor 2 — Keys 3 and 4
PCB floor 3 — Key 5
PCB floor 4 — Key 6

Up/Down Transporters are your way to move between PCB floors. These are represented by up/down arrows on this map. Note that their colour indicates which floor they will transport you to.
In the game you will see these transporters as **OR GATES** not as arrows.



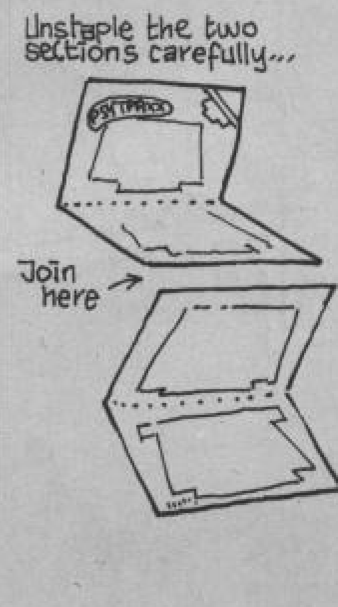
Look for a screwdriver and 3 **Master Key Cards.** There is one of each on each floor.

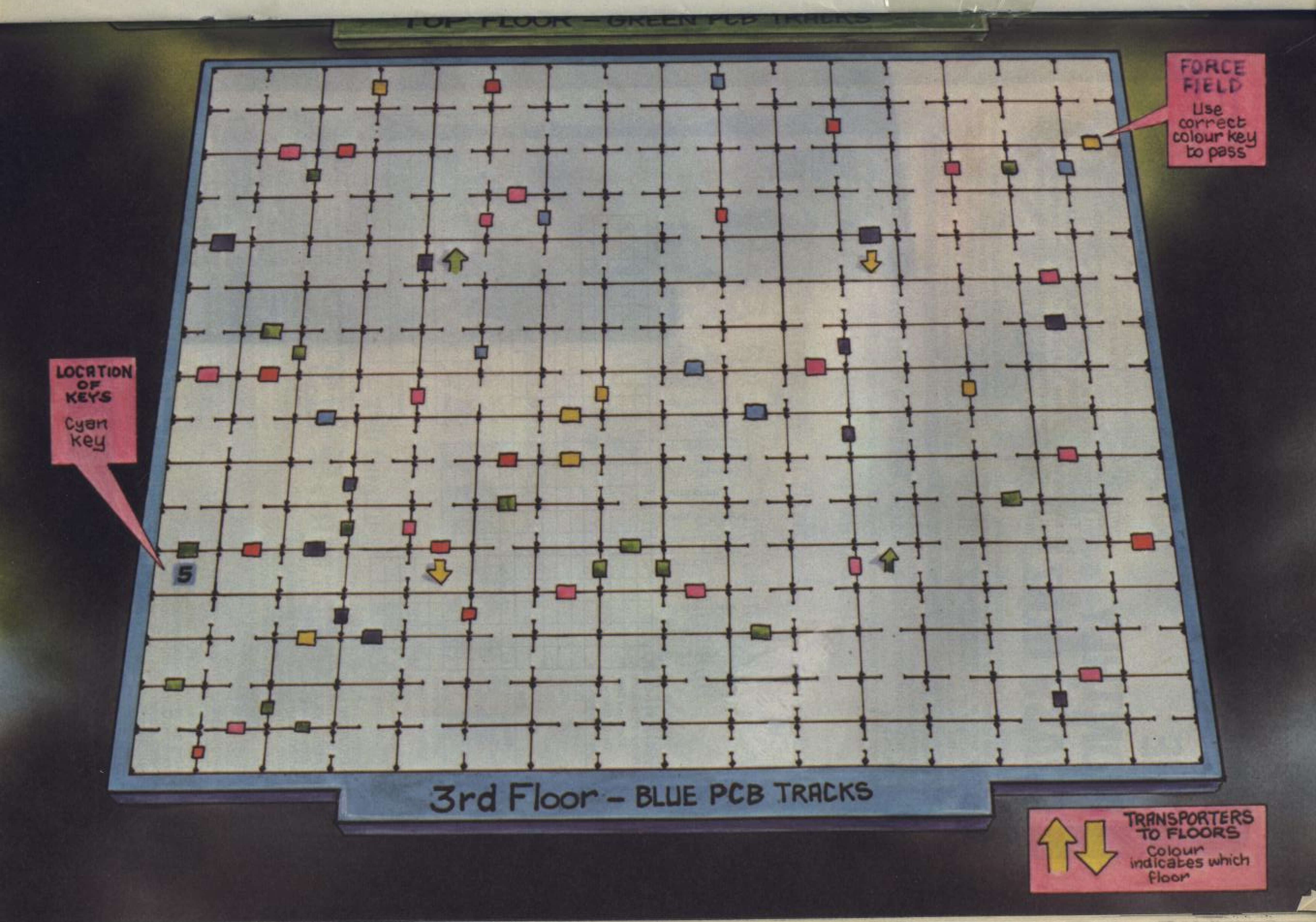


Force Fields are indicated on the map as solid square blocks. You cannot pass through them unless you hold the correctly coloured Key Card.

THIS MAP IS A PULL-OUT

Unstaple the two sections carefully...




TOP FLOOR - GREEN PCB TRACKS
FORCE FIELD
Use correct colour key to pass
LOCATION OF KEYS
Cyan key
5
3rd Floor - BLUE PCB TRACKS
TRANSPORTERS TO FLOORS
Colour indicates which floor

THE MONTHLY CRASH QUIZ

This month's CRASH QUIZ has been sent in by **Robert Leedham** from Amersham, Bucks. He warns that it is more difficult than the usual Quiz and requires common sense and logical thinking – the sort of thing taught in schools today!

The results of the 1985 CRASH READERS' AWARDS have come in slightly ahead of time, but jumbled up. From the clues given can you identify the programmer and his game, the company marketing it, its price and the award it was given?

Robert says the chart should be completed using a tick for a definite YES and a cross for a definite NO. To give you a start, the first clue states that Richard Smallpox's program costs £6.95. This means that he couldn't have written a game costing any other price, or that another programmer could have written a game costing 6.95. This information has already been entered on the chart as an example.

Once all the obvious information has been collated, the possibilities will have been narrowed down, and some new facts might have been revealed. The clues should then be re-read with these new facts in mind to discover further positive/negative relationships.

Fill in the final details on the small chart below. These results are the ones to send in to the Quiz. You can cut the form out or just write them out again on a postcard if you prefer. **DON'T FORGET TO PUT YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS ON THE ANSWERS!!**

First three correct entries drawn will each receive £25 worth of software and a CRASH T-shirt, and the three runners-up will each receive a CRASH T-shirt.

	Sabre Mole	Lords of Lunch-time	Kokotoni Fred	Worse Things Happen in Pyramids	Trash Kanga	Software Panics	Melbourne Shed	Diatribesoft	Gargle Games	Microhernia	Best Graphics	Best Sound Effects	Most Original	Best Overall Game	Worst Game	£5.50	£5.95	£6.95	£9.95	£14.95
Malcolm Heavens																		X		
Richard Smallpox																X	X	✓	X	X
Matthew Sniff																		X		
Derek Brew-up																		X		
Costa Panhandle																		X		
£5.50																				
£5.95																				
£6.95																				
£9.95																				
£14.95																				
Best Graphics																				
Best Sound Effects																				
Most Original																				
Best Overall Game																				
Worst Game																				
Software Panics																				
Melbourne Shed																				
Diatribesoft																				
Gargle Games																				
Microhernia																				

Author	
Program	
Company	
Award	
Price	

- Richard Smallpox's program costs £6.95
- KOKOTONI FRED is the most expensive, but is not marketed by Melbourne Shed
- SABRE MOLE, which is not sold by Diatribesoft, was voted Most Original games, whilst the game with best graphics came from Software Panics
- TRASH KANGA, which was not programmed by Matthew Sniff, can be bought from Microhernia
- Costa Panhandle receives royalties from Gargle Games. The game with best sound effects costs £5.95
- Derek Brew-up's LORDS OF LUNCH-TIME is the game just more expensive than the one from Diatribesoft, and is just cheaper than the best overall game, which was not written by Richard Smallpox.

Results of CRASH QUIZ
Results of the November Crash Quiz

We asked you to fill in the dotted blocks and tell us the name of the computer hero which resulted. The answer was, of course, **ZIGGY**. This quiz received a staggering amount of replies and virtually all correct! The 2,000 plus correct ones went into the bag and the three winners are:
Chi Wai Tsang, Lisson Green Est., London NW8
Paul Miller, Mangotsfield, Bristol
Daniel Rogers, Wistanstow, Craven Arms, Shrops.

They each recieve £25 worth of software. The three runners up, who each get a CRASH T-shirt are:
Simon Trillo, Bream, Nr. Lydney, Glos.
A.J. Hitchens, Gosforth, Newcastle-on-Tyne
Gary Bowen, Aldridge, Walsall, W. Midlands

We'll have a grand competition clearing up in the next issue to catch up on some of the results in the pre-Christmas issues.

LETTERS



As I write this the Christmas pudding is still being digested (yes folks, they keep poor old Lloyd at work even over Yuletide, still the hammering of my 1917 Hermes typewriter keys doesn't disturb anyone, as they are tucked up watching Raiders of the Lost Ark on the box) — and no, those aren't violins you can hear weeping softly in the background!

The letters file is groaning under the weight of correspondence, and I have to admit, that what with the pre-Christmas rush and all (the usual excuses you know), I haven't had the time to go through everything as thoroughly as usual, so if you don't get printed, hang on, you may yet!

From this month's bunch, I have picked this letter warning of the dangers of contracts as letter of the month. . . .



Dear Lloyd,

A warning to all you hopeful programmers out there: Beware of Contracts.

I will now explain this cryptic message, which no doubt, has you on the edge of your seat. In January of this year *The Quill* came into my possession and I was most impressed with it. After typing in the demo program in the booklet and spending a couple of days fiddling with it, I started to write an adventure. Just a small one, I said to myself.

Two months later, I finished my 'small' adventure. It had over a hundred locations, over fifty objects and a semi-interactive character. Oh, I thought, what now?

Eventually I decided to send it off to a software house, just to see what happened. So I looked through the back pages of 'another computer magazine' and saw an ad for a software house that I'd never heard of — just what I was looking for.

So I packed up the game and sent it off with a covering letter. Three weeks later they wrote back and I was amazed to see the words, 'we consider your program acceptable for marketing,' printed on the letter. I was, to say the least, over the moon. They offered me a minimum of £350 initial royalties, and more later. I agreed to their terms and they said they would send me a contract very soon.

Another three weeks passed and no contract arrived, so I rang them up and they said they'd sent the contracts off two weeks ago and they must be lost in the post. Another set arrived by post within the week. I myself would have accepted it as it was (I couldn't understand a word of it), but my dad took one look and said it was a load of ****.

So we wrote back saying that the contract was no good. According to them, all the software house had to do was to make one copy within five years of me signing the contract (it said on the contract that they would use their 'best efforts' to market the program).

Many weeks of haggling followed, until we finally agreed on a contract which gave the software house 60 days to pay £232 (where did the £350 go?) and if they went bust, all rights would return to me. The contract was signed and returned.

57 days later, nothing had happened, so we wrote them a nasty letter, in which we mentioned the mystic words of power 'Small Claims Court' and hey presto, on the last day of the contract, there was the cheque.

The moral of this story is to understand the contract, make sure you know what you are signing.

Karl Emmins, Swindon, Wiltshire

You must tell us, Karl, whether the game gets published finally. Your story illustrates a very good point about publishing contracts in general. The use of that wonderful phrase 'best efforts to market' is very common and implies goodwill without much else. Just remember that a contract is designed to protect the interests of the company issuing it, rather than those of the person it is offered to, although the spirit of a contract is that it should protect both parties' interests.

IMAGINE CRASH

Our article on Imagine carried in the Christmas Special edition has aroused quite a bit of interest from readers, but perhaps the most prominent writer is one who was a protagonist in the affair.
Bruce Everiss *was Imagine's Operations Director. Naturally his observations are personal, but there are a few small points that he feels were inaccurate in the article which should be put right.*

Dear Sir,

It is about time that the public had a glimpse into the can of worms that was Imagine's demise. A lot of questionable activity remains untold. I admire your courage against the Hetherington/Lawson propensity to litigate and to threaten the same. There were, however, a few inaccuracies in the piece which I would like to correct.

1. When I joined Imagine it was as General Manager. Upon incorporation as a Limited Company in August 1983, I became Operations Director.

2. Eugene Evans did manage to get some games published. *Wacky Waiters*, *Catcha Snatcha* (unplayable), *Frantic* (withdrawn it was so bad) and *Arcadia 64* (a jerky, pale shadow of the original).

3. I did not attach myself to any other director, I merely did my job. Ian Hetherington always denigrated David Lawson and his common law wife Diane Willets as being 'common' and 'peasants'. This suddenly changed about April 1984 and in retrospect it is easy to see why.

4. I wasn't just associated with Microdigital. I founded it, was Managing Director



and co-owned it with my brother.

5. Just before Hetherington and Lawson went to America I investigated the possibility of a 100% sell out. A major company was interested. It would have meant Imagine continuing, the staff kept on, the creditors paid. Mark Butler thought it was a good idea. Hetherington/Lawson didn't and steamrollered Mark so the idea was dropped. It is now obvious to me why.

6. Lawson/Hetherington are not trading as Finchspeed. They are now trading as Fireiron Limited, 28 Exchange Street East, Liverpool, phone: 051 236 2036.

7. Imagine isn't the only unsuccessful microcomputer company Hetherington has been involved in. Others include B & B Computers (Bolton) Ltd., DAMS Business Computers Ltd., and Dawn Computers Ltd.

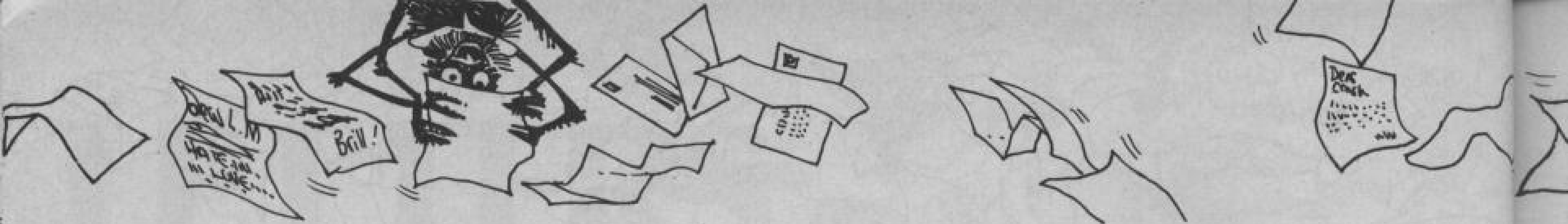
8. When Hetherington says he is sick to death of people insinuating that anything untoward happened at Imagine, I can only assume that he is suffering from amnesia. The lying and deception were almost boundless, as many will testify.

I hope these few points help to clarify the situation a little further. I am amazed that Hetherington/Lawson can have acted as they have and yet remain apparently unscathed. In my opinion their current attempts to suppress the freedom of the press are indicative of their attitudes and behaviour.
Bruce Everiss, Wirral, Merseyside

From a participant in the events of Imagine's demise, to an observer. . . .
LM

Dear Sir,
Although the crash of Imagine was a shock to the software world, one has to ask oneself if it is so surprising and if it is bad for the business.
After seeing the articles in August's edition of CRASH I loaded my collection of Imagine tapes and was not that impressed. When compared with games like *Atic Atac, Jet Set Willy, Sabre Wulf* and *Match Point* all Imagine games pale into insignificance. Indeed, in a recent survey in one magazine (whose name escapes me at the moment) of the worst games around, three Imagine games came in the top ten — *Zip Zap, Molar Maul* and *Schizoids* (second only to *Transylvanian Tower*). Only *Zzoom* and *Jumping Jack* stand out today, a year after they first saw the light of day.
Not only were most of the games mediocre, but also Imagine had grown too big for itself. Software houses are now mainly small. Let's hope it stays that way because Imagine became so big that pursuit of big profits overruled all else and the quality of the games became of secondary importance. No doubt Butler and Lawson hoped that Imagine's name alone would sell the games regardless of quality. Eighteen months ago Butler and Lawson declared that Imagine would not employ more than ten people ever. If only they had kept to their word.
Let this disaster be a warning to up and coming companies. Biggest isn't always best.
James Penwell, Paignton, Devon

I have to confess that as a very naiive Spectrum owner, I played Schizoids *for hours thinking, 'it must be me!' Loading it again the following night I began to think that perhaps it wasn't me after all. Looking back now with hindsight and a lot more experience I know it definitely wasn't me — that*



game was simply a bummer, and as it was one of their first releases after Arcadia, *perhaps we should have all seen that the rot had already set in at the core. Then there was the non-working* Ah Diddums *and the non--battling* Stonkers. *CRASH got a bit mad about* Stonkers *but Imagine never got rid of the bug and seemingly had no intention of doing so despite all their assurances.*

You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time.

Occasionally I come across a slightly older letter that missed being published, but which has some interesting points in it. This writer has a slightly new angle on the price of software piracy theory. . . .
LM

COST EFFECTIVE

Dear CRASH-ers,

In the last issue of the Personal Fanzine *ATV XVIII*, its editor Trevor Mendham (co-author of *United* from C.C.S.) wrote a most interesting article concerning piracy.

Trevor, while in no way condoning piracy, does, however, hit out at some most unlikely causes: the software houses and the retailers!

The points against the software houses? Basically, the old argument concerning the cost of the tapes, as exemplified by *Manic Miner, Jet Set Willy* and later by *3D Deathchase*. In the article *MM* is described as a program with imaginative graphics, but a very simple program.' *JSW* is described as being almost a direct copy of *MM* but with different graphics. *3D Deathchase* is criticised in the editor's comments and described as simple, including the 3D effect, which could be looked up in any computer book, or worked out from scratch in a week or so.'

All this, according to Trevor, makes the games (although he admits they are exceptions) not worth the £5.00 to £7.00 price range most of them cost.

As to the retailers! The article makes these the main villains, with stores such as Smiths and Boots demanding — and receiving — a massive 70% discount on games so that of a £7.00 program, £4.90 would go to stock and only £2.10 to the producer!

My own comments are thus: in regard to *Manic Miner* et al, I'm sure Trevor would be able to write such a program as it is his work. Most people cannot, being like me and not able to tell a GOTO from a GOSUB. Also, if such programmers do exist, why haven't they appeared on the computer scene with good games on cheap tapes already?

To the problem of retailers, Trevor says that he buys direct by mail to cut them out and wishes others would do the same.

The only trouble with that, as far I can see, is the cost of postage, postal orders (or cheques) make the cost of buying the game even higher than the shop prices, and when you add to that the amount of things lost in the post. . . .

What do you think?
Brian H. Longstaff, Sheffield, South Yorks.

Brian adds to his letter that anyone wanting a copy of the fanzine ATV XVIII*(issue 11 contains the above--mentioned article), write to Trevor Mendham, 53 Towncourt Crescent, Petts Wood, Kent BR5 1PH (50p including postage).*

As to my feelings on the matter: well this letter is not absolutely recent, and there have been some reasonable budget games out since its writer sent it in. First off, though, I don't agree, and I would be surprised if very many did, that Jet Set Willy *is a copy of* Manic Miner *with different graphics. There are, of course similarities — you would be very upset if Alistair McLean started writing like Barbara Cartland. Authors have a funny knack of sounding (or looking) like themselves in everything they do! I also doubt very much that the 3D effect in* Deathchase *could be cobbled together in a week, even with looking it up in any computer book, because let's face it, if that were the case why did it take so long for a programmer to do something like it, and why haven't there been a thousand copies of it since (or even budget versions)? Incidentally, Trevor Mendham (whom I do not know), who co-wrote* United *for C.C.S., has hardly proved his points on these matters with that particular program, which is not all that inspiring to say the least on either game play or graphics (I apologise in advance if Trevor has written something stunning of which I am unaware).*

As to the retailers — well yes, the big chain stores do demand a rather high cut of the sale price, but the average range of discount being offered is anyway in the region of 45% to 60% depending on quantities ordered. For a software house to 'get into' Smiths or Boots, means that they are assured of a reasonably large sale of units, which is good for them and worth giving the extra few per cent discount. It really isn't the percentage demanded by retailers which makes the software price up, that is already determined in advance by the software houses. To some degree, the proof of this is that even before Smiths, Boots et al, were selling software in a big way, the prices of software direct by mail from the producers was pretty high. It's true that if software houses could sell direct, prices might come down by as much as 40% or so, but that goes across the board. Would you really like to have to buy direct every item in your life when you can conveniently go into a shop and get them? The retailers have to get their cut or they couldn't operate and there wouldn't be any shops. In a way, one of the big villains is VAT. Don't forget that when the software house sells to a distributor 15% goes on the wholesale price, when the distributor sells to a shop another 15% goes on, and when the shop sells to you, yet another 15% goes on. It adds up! Should you try to buy direct, to cut the retailer out, do the software houses really let you have a £7 game for £2.10? I don't think so!
LM

STARTING UP

Dear Lloyd,

My friend and I are planning on starting up our own software company, but we are not sure how to go about marketing, and also any legalities. Could you please advise us on the situation.
C. R. Thomas and M. J. R. Leighton, Chester, Cheshire

Good grief, that would take hours! A few points though. You could trade as a 'firm' (or partnership) or as a Limited Liability Company. To be shareholders in the latter you would have to be over 18. The advantage of a 'firm' is that you can just say you're doing it and that's it, although you would be well advised to get an accountant immediately to fix up the financial requirements and sort out legal agreements between the partners. The disadvantage is that you are entirely and personally liable for any debts the 'firm' may run up — for ever. A limited company (Ltd.) is much



MONOCHROME MUSINGS

Dear Lloyd,

This is the first letter I have written to you because I have never felt the need before. But no longer!

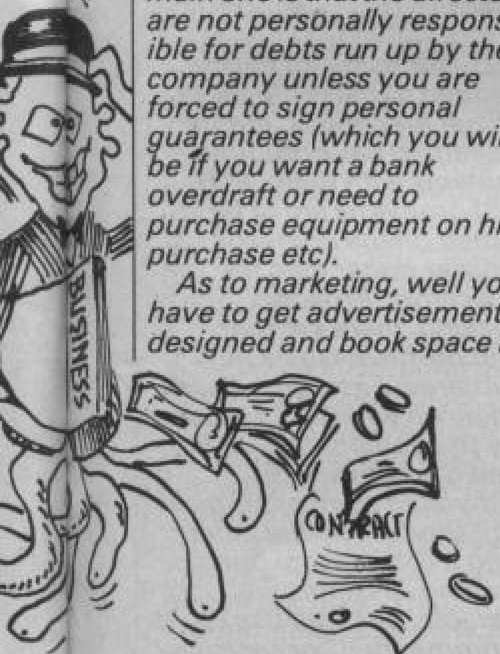
On this very boring Sunday morning, whilst lying in bed, I flicked through my latest issue of CRASH. I am still in bed at the moment, but I tell you, this is the last straw. I'm fed up with it. It gets straight up my left nostril. Why is it that when I look through your brilliant magazine, it is terribly let down by lack of colour in the games reviews?

When looking through I am not intrigued by wonderful colour, oh no! Instead, great big black and white blobs of background and photos in reviews jump out at me. Surely you think it would be far more appealing, when printing the photos of the game reviewed, to do so with REAL COLOUR PHOTOS.

Apparently not!



more complicated to set up and costs about £120 to £180 to buy in the first place (you buy a readymade from specialist legal firms who set companies up) and is forced by copious laws to do certain things which an accountant or solicitor would advise you on. The advantages are numerous over a partnership 'firm', but perhaps the main one is that the directors are not personally responsible for debts run up by the company unless you are forced to sign personal guarantees (which you will be if you want a bank overdraft or need to purchase equipment on hire purchase etc).



As to marketing, well you have to get advertisements designed and book space in magazines — this isn't particularly cheap, especially if you want to use colour. A typical cost might be £250 for original artwork, another £250 to have the artwork screened and made up as film sets, and say £2000 to book space in three magazines (this is for a whole page). On top of that comes the cost of having cassette inlays printed and cassettes duplicated. Marketing is also very much tied into distribution. Distributors won't be very interested in your games unless you can show that they are being properly promoted.

The whole exercise is very time consuming and expensive as well as being full of obvious risks, and it needs very careful consideration before embarking on the enterprise. Although it is quite possible to do things at a low level, it is doubtful whether you would have much success without an initial investment of something like £10,000 available.

LM



DELTA WING

Dear Lloyd,

I have just bought *Delta Wing* by Creative Sparks, and thought you would like my comments.

As an aircraft engineer at Heathrow and a dedicated 'button pusher' who has a growing library of flight simulations, if I tell you that *Delta Wing* is the most enjoyable one to date I hope you'll take notice!

Technically it is correct with the flight envelope and the instruments such as Stall warning, L. Range-S radar (like some RAF fighters have, I'm ex-RAF too!) other instruments are similar to Digital Integration's *Fighter Pilot*. The addition of the air-brake is a godsend in combat allowing tighter turns.

Details such as the pilot's hand moving on the flight controls and the G-effect upon his legs during turns show the programmer has done his homework and I suspect flown in a modern jet fighter.

Newcomers to the game may not realise that you can watch your bomb fall to its target if you turn and dive after pressing the button (remember to use the air-brake). The bomb is drawn in good 3D are are the base, enemy and allies, though they are rather small and simple, they also have a tiny bug, for when you bank at speed near them, they tend to leap into the air — sonic boom perhaps?

Enemy aircraft are drawn with less detail than D.I's but they do roll over and spin when shot (so do you come to that). The game may lack actual runways (you can land anywhere) but it still takes skill to get it right.

Steve Burdon, Wraysbury, Staines, Middlesex

Well, I have to agree with you, Steve, I thought Delta Wing *was the most fun I'd had for ages when I had a go at it*

LM

Before you say it, I know there is the odd colour review, well done; but sadly it is not true of the main percentage, is it? The colour can change the look of a game. For example, not so long ago I was put off buying a game due to the fact that it did not look good in black and white. Later on my mate bought it and I rushed round to his house to see what it looked like. I was surprised no end how the use of colour made great improvements to the overall look of the game.

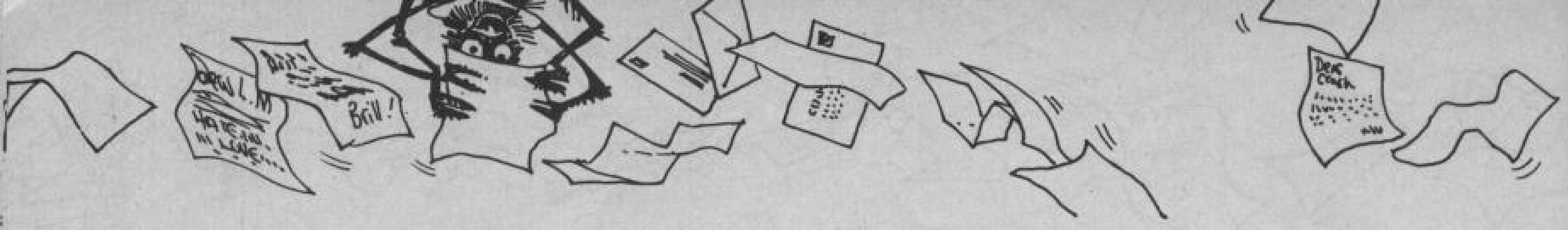
Well, this is the end of my moan, sorry to do so on my first letter.

Adrian Patto, Ash, Nr. Aldershot, Hants

You're quite right of course, colour makes a huge difference to the look of a game, but there are a few reasons why CRASH does not have all its reviews in colour. First off, COST! Each colour picture used has to be 'screened' and separated into its four component colours. This may seem simple, but it takes a while to do and costs approximately £50 per picture used. Say there are an average of 35 reviews in each issue with half of them getting two pictures, the cost for the 53 screen pictures would be in the region of £2,650! Secondly; page availability. We cannot have colour on every page, again this would be prohibitive in cost terms, and is anyway extremely hard to do from the printer's point of view. The other difficulty is that we are reviewing games, as they come in, often up to the last minute of an issue. The colour takes longer to shoot and process, and more importantly, the colour pages have to be sent to the printer at least a week and a half before the black and white pages.

It's true there are some ways around the cost side. One is to group the colour pics in rows so they can be treated as one 'separation', and this is done in some magazines. The drawback is that the reviews all have to be clumped together, and obviously you must get as many to a page as possible, which means very short reviews, consequently tiny colour pictures and it's often undesirable from a design point of view. So what with one thing and another that's really the way it has to be.

LM



A BEGINNER'S GUIDE

Dear Lloyd,

Hello! As the war continues between the magazines, I have decided to draw up a 'Beginners Guide to the Mags'. I just hope that no Commodore owners peep at this anyway. . . .

CRASH: read by people who own computers.
QL USER: read by people who *will* own computers but they are 'lost' in the post.
C&VG: read by Spectrum and Atari owners who are always attacking each other. Always the most expensive.
P.C.G.: read by people who program their computers to destroy other computers.
YOUR SPECTRUM: read by people who know everything about computers.
POPULAR COMPUTING WEEKLY: read by people who *think* they know everything about computers.
BIG K: read by many people with half a brain cell between them.
ALL COMMODORE MAGS: read by people who wish they were half as clever as BIG K readers.
MICRO ADVENTURER: read by people who ate in the Goblins' Dungeon.
ACORN USER: read by rich, smarmy people who should be locked in the Goblins' Dungeon.

Keep up the good work, especially you!.

Andrew Hill (15), Bartley Green, Birmingham

I think that's all wicked, Andrew, most of those magazines probably love you more than your parents!
LM

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND

Dear Lloyd,

Please publish this letter as a warning to all your readers.

My second favourite magazine is glaring at me from the racks of W.H. Smith (no, not *Fiesta*), so digging into the wife's pocket, out comes 95p. Back home I settle down to browse through it and come across an ad in the back pages. Typical ad, reads as follows: Spectrum software to swap, send your list for mine by return of post.'

Hmmm, I think, obviously not all originals, but I'm already swapping software with three other people by post, I thought another one to my list wouldn't hurt.

Anyway, I drop him a line and a few days later a package pops through the letter box containing a letter and a cassette. Upon opening I see he's requested seven of the latest games. Looking through his list, well I can't believe it! He's got almost everything you can think of. (Thinks) I could do with some of those!! So I carefully select seven of his best, jot them down in my letter to him along with his requested games, which took ages to copy on to his blank cassette, and send them off with a blank tape of my own.

A week later, nothing happens (must be busy over there in Ireland).

Two weeks later — still heard nothing (getting worried).

Three weeks later: I drop him a line just in case it got delayed in the post (very unlikely)!

Four weeks later, still no reply. . . . Five weeks gone and still nothing.

So what, I hear you say, well I've wasted postage, packing, one C60 cassette, and most of all my time.

That's what happens when you get ripped off. Now taking it that this little Irish *** has done the same to quite a few other people who wrote to him, you can imagine why his software list is so long.

Conclusion: when answering ads of this sort be careful when you send software copies through the post.

Gary Ogden, Highfields, Stafford

Well, at the risk of offending, you know what they say — there's no honour among thieves!
LM

RETAIL RIP OFF

Dear Lloyd,

I'm writing to complain about the software shops in Dudley. Some of them (mentioning no names) try to rip you off by selling £1.99 games (retail price marked in CRASH) at £3.95! The selections hardly ever change; it's disgusting. At least we have some I suppose. Another thing; I have to look really hard to find CRASH in the newsagents round here and when I do find it there are only three or four left — and that happens the morning it comes out!

In CRASH issue 10 (November) there was a game called *Sub Hunter*. But is there another submarine game to kill off ships other than Protek's version?

Oh, and could we have some sort of percentage rating for the games in FRONTLINE?

Steven Ashwell, Dudley, West Midlands

It does seem to be a problem that CRASH sells out of shops so fast, and as often as not, they won't top up. I can't think of another Spectrum submarine game, with the exception of one by Pulsonic, but I couldn't recommend that. I'll pass on your request to Angus Ryall for ratings.

The next writer has been having trouble with hyper-load cassettes. In fact I've received a lot of mail on the subject, with most writers complaining about the system and having trouble loading the games.
LM

FAST LOADER TROUBLE

Dear Lloyd,

I was very annoyed when I splashed out for a copy of *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* from Ocean. I rushed it home and attempted to load it, but found to my dismay, that I could not get it to load at any volume nor on either side.

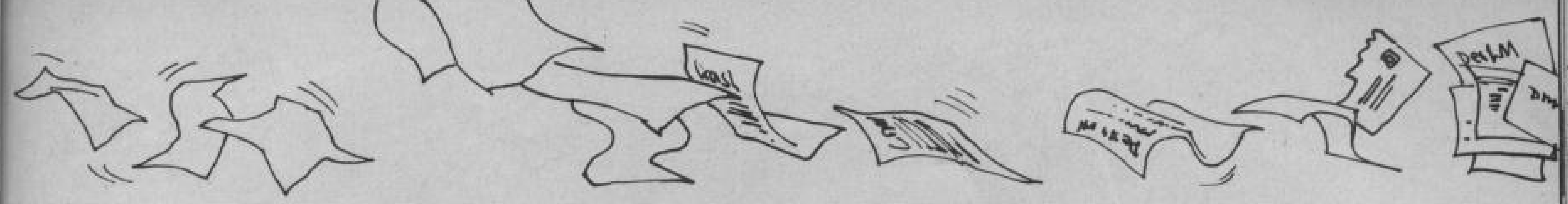
I took it back in disgust and got another copy. This time, success after 15 minutes, I got side one to load and had great fun playing it. After a while I decided to load side two. After 30 minutes of trying to load it I gave up and got my money back. I know of several other people who couldn't even get side one to load. What is the point of using fast loaders when you take 15 minutes just to get the volume correct. I think they are meant to stop people from copying the game but it also seems to stop people from buying it.

Ian Burns, Weymouth, Dorset

Fast loaders are, of course, intended to make life more difficult for copiers, but they do seem to have brought problems with them. BUT most problems are to be blamed on the domestic recorder rather than the duplicators. Broadly speaking, there are four main problems to be encountered. First; dirty heads and pinch wheels. The best way to overcome this is to clean the heads with methylated spirit or surgical spirit (preferably the latter) using a cotton wool bud. Cleaning cassettes are available, but their use is not recommended because they don't half whale the heads, and once used they can actually redeposit muck on the heads. A point to bear in mind — the popularly quoted method of amplifying sound by removing the cassette and pressing play on your recorder, is not such a good idea for the pinch wheels because they are running against the metal stud that normally carries the tape and after a while the rubber gets hot and becomes shiny, losing its friction characteristics for driving the tape.

Two: If you use a battery operated recorder, check the batteries are in peak condition, otherwise the cassette motor will run slowly or at varying speeds and destroy the validity of the output signal.

Three: Unwanted frequency interference, such as may be occasioned by the high tension on televisions or where electricity supplies are in constant use by various appliances especially those using electric motors like hair driers, fans etc; and also where houses are fitted with dimmer switches, which can chop the frequency. Any one or a combination of these situations can cause poor loading — and of course a



sloppy electricity supply can do the same.

Four; Usually the main problem which causes poor or irregular loading is badly aligned tape heads. Most makes of cheap domestic tape recorder do provide some means of adjusting the azimuth of the head (the angle of the tape head to the travel of the tape across it - if this is not precisely at a right angle to the tape, the signal, and especially the tape bias, will be distorted). The head is usually adjusted by means of a small screw on the top. Some recorders provide a small access hole through which to stick the screw-driver, others will require the casing to be removed to get at the heads. Adjusting the angle of the heads can be done while a computer game cassette is playing back. Have the volume set at three quarters level and twiddle the screw up or down until the clearest, sharpest sound is achieved (usually, a very high pitched squealing). For goodness sake, don't attempt this, especially if it means removing the casing, unless you know what you are doing, or someone who does, is present, otherwise you could risk an electrical shock. I must say, in all fairness, that although some hyper loaders have given us trouble at CRASH, most of them do load first time. A bad recording should be easily spotted by an experienced ear, by listening to the signal beforehand, thus saving a lot of wasted time. Another point is that we have noticed recently that the level of signal on tapes is higher than it used to be and the three quarter level may prove too high — set volume so that the signal heard through the Spectrum is just audible. Make sure your mic and ear leads are connected properly and avoid passing them too close to the TV set. DON'T leave cassettes on TVs or on audio equipment as the magnetic field can corrupt the code on the tape. DON'T leave cassettes on or too near the Spectrum either. DON'T leave cassettes in the recorder. In our experience, AVOID buying the so-called 'computer compatible' cassette recorders, and go for a bog-standard one. Our Hitachi TRQ-289 has proven ultra-reliable over 18 months of constant use, and it has had barely any maintenance, which goes to show that if it is properly set up to start with, it needs little doing to it afterwards apart from a head clean. If you follow these few points properly, you should have no real problem loading any commercial software on the market today.

LM

OVERALL RATING

Dear Sir,

Firstly, may I congratulate you on a very informative and interesting magazine. However, I would like to make one slight criticism about your rating scheme. The problem lies with the Overall rating which you give as an average of all the other ratings.

May I give as an example of my point your review of *Carpet Capers* which appeared in issue 6. While I do not doubt that the game itself is very poor, the idea for the game is good and thus the originality rating should be high. However a high originality rating would have made the overall rating much higher than the 14% it did receive, so you gave originality **N/A**, which I can only take to mean Not Applicable.

This has also occurred on other games where you have perhaps given ratings a little higher or lower percentage than they deserve just to keep the Overall rating in keeping with what your reviewers think it should be.

May I suggest then that you do not make the final rating an average of all the others but that you keep it totally separate and mark it as you would the other categories.

Andrew Bell, North Anston, Sheffield

The review in question (and the issue) did have a rating for originality and, as I have mentioned elsewhere in this column, it was dropped as being completely inoperable. However, the illustration of his point that Andrew gives is very good, and underlines what is wrong with the averaged-out Overall rating on the reviews. You are quite right: if a game is absolute rubbish but has a brilliant front end and lovely packaging which gives it a high Getting Started rating, then the Overall figure goes far too high and gives a misleading impression. Although this issue's reviews are rated on the old principle of the average Overall rating, the March issue (14) will be done differently, each reviewer giving an overall figure considered suitable for the game in general. Thanks for the push Andrew.

LM

JUST REMEMBER. . .

Dear CRASH,

I'd like to reply to the letter written by a certain Mr. Robert Holmes in the November issue. I was most annoyed to hear this man bring down Ultimate in the way he did, and to quote, 'It's only a program, not the Holy Grail'.

My argument is this, (please take note). A long time ago, when the ZX81 was in need of an update, the Spectrum arrived from the happy bunch down at Sinclair. I managed to obtain my Spectrum and was very pleased with it. Colour, sound, good graphics, I thought this was fantastic, then Spectrum software arrived, perhaps the first outside Sinclair was Bug-Byte's *Spectral Invaders*, but that doesn't matter. Anyway the first batch of games were brilliant, simply because we didn't know any different except for wasting money down the arcade. By this 'first batch' I mean games like *Orbiter, Hungry Horace, Winged Avenger*, all bug-ridden, weedy graphics, character movement graphics (except *Horace*) and a beep here and there, and a joystick option if you were lucky. By today's standards these are pretty poor offerings and CRASH would only give 30-40% for these games. Then, suddenly, those people from Ashby de la Zouch (Ultimate) brought us *Jetpac* — brilliant we thought — great colour, sound, smooth graphics and the first real loading screen. To put it all shortly, Ultimate were ahead of their time by a couple of years, I mean if *Jetpac* were released today it would still get 90% plus in



your reviews. They didn't stop there either. *Pssst* came along, then *Tranz-Am* and the underrated *Cookie*. Even more amazing was that these games were 16K and other companies couldn't touch them with 48K.

Next came the 48K series from Ultimate with *Lunar Jetman* (or as the Currah Microspeech likes to call him — Jetmon). I thought *Atic Atac* was great and I still enjoy it to this day.

It has only been recently that companies are reaching Ultimate's standard, but Ultimate still produce the most professional Number 1 Spectrum games.

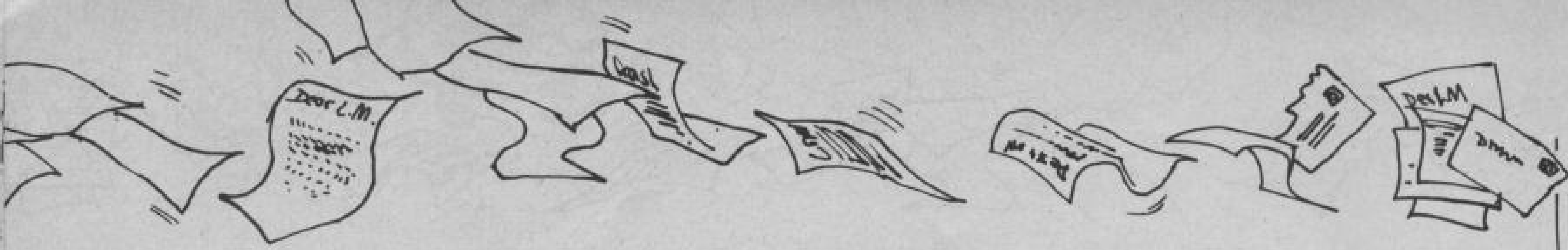
I mean, Ultimate were producing high class games when Ocean were a mere drop, when Creative Sparks were a smoulder, when Microsphere were on push-bikes and when Imagine were deciding whether their next advert should be three miles by six miles or if they should produce a game first instead.

So next time you see the name Ultimate, think about what good they have done for the Spectrum and congratulations to the widely recognised ACG team (whoever they may be), and to CRASH for supporting them.

Ian Howell, South Wootton, Kings Lynn

Quite right too! And don't forget, Ultimate were the people who melted joysticks with their games! The next writer is a bit puzzled about another aspect of joysticks. . .

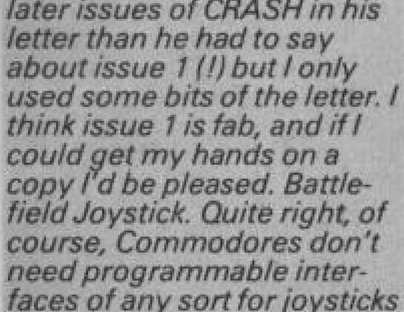
LM



HOW COME?

Dear Lloyd,
Could you please explain this; in your Battlefield Joystick article (November) you said you used the CBM 64 version of *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* because it is much tougher. I agree, because I also own a CBM 64 as well as *Decathlon*. But later on, on the same page, it is stated that it was the Comcon Programmable Interface from Frel Ltd. that you used for the joystick test. But as far as my knowledge goes, I do not use any Comcon Interface on my CBM 64 because the computer will not accept the interface, and has its own joystick ports.
Can you also tell me who the people are on the CRASH HOTLINE page, as you have never told us. By the way, I own a copy of the first issue of CRASH. I don't know why everybody is after it because I think it's crap, but don't get the idea I will give it away. No way. I'd like to keep all the set.
Marhar Khan, Edinburgh.

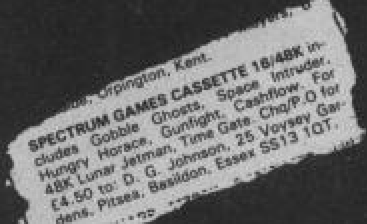
To be fair, Marhar had much nicer things to say about later issues of CRASH in his letter than he had to say about issue 1 (!) but I only used some bits of the letter. I think issue 1 is fab, and if I could get my hands on a copy I'd be pleased. Battlefield Joystick. Quite right, of course, Commodores don't need programmable interfaces of any sort for joysticks — perhaps the article didn't make it very clear. The CBM 64 version of Decathlon *was used for the endurance and strength test on the joysticks.*



All the other tests were made using the Spectrum and that's where the Comcon interface came in. The people who appear on the HOTLINE pages are various members of the CRASH reviewing team who all live in or around Ludlow and are now unmanageably big-headed after appearing on telly.
LM

A BIT OF PIRACY

Dear Lloyd,
To do my bit against piracy I thought I would send you this cutting from *Sinclair User* magazine. When you've finished with it, pass it on to Ultimate, Quicksilva or Melbourne House. I'm sure they would be interested in it.
Lunar Jetman, from somewhere in Essex



...., Orpington, Kent.
SPECTRUM GAMES CASSETTE 16/48K includes Gobble Ghosts, Space Intruder, Hungry Horace, Gunfight, Cashflow. For 48K Lunar Jetman, Time Gate. Chq/P.O for £4.50 to: D. G. Johnson, 25 Voysey Gardens, Pitsea, Basildon, Essex SS13 1QT.

I guess they'll read it in CRASH, Lunar Jetman.
LM

TOWARDS 85

Dear Mr. Mangram,
I am a Spectrum owner, and like many of the ilk I am dedicated to my machine — not wishing to read about other machines and their games and always assured of the superiority of the Spectrum over other personal computers (including the MSX!!!). Because of this, my obvious choice of games magazine is CRASH, because it provides a concentration of news and reviews on **only** Spectrum games. I also subscribe to *PCG* because, to my mind, that magaz. . . . *(Censored! We can't have this sort of thing in CRASH!)* . . . And so to the point of my letter — the improvement of your magazine (which in theory offers the most). Here are my suggestions:

1. Hall of Slime — this spot is generally a joke — lists of names with often ludicrously large scores and no verification. My suggestion is to categorise scores according to game, including, say, the top ten scores.

2. Playing Tips — let tips be the main features, eg HOW TO DEFEAT DOOMDARK'. Here, tips from editors and readers could be consolidated to the benefit of the games player. Thus you could encourage readers to send in all tips and pokes etc. This would stop letters with a mention of a game title being printed under Playing Tips which is the situation at the moment.

3. The Hotline — in my opinion, is not as good an idea as a monthly Top Forty. Many people I know would like to know which games are selling best rather than what other people think are best. Perhaps a sales chart could be published alongside the readers' poll.

4. General — could you introduce more articles on software houses, programmers, previews etc. You could put all reviews, competitions etc, together for ease of reading. Could you lessen the advertisements of uneccessary things, eg. advertisements of your own magazine?

However, let this letter not be full of criticism (albeit constructive). The length and depth of your reviews is comparable to any magazine. The number of competitions is very nice. Your covers are excellent. The Piracy Dossier was an excellent idea and the comic strips are superb. I hope, if this letter is not published, it at least serves some use in the improvement of your magazine from very good to excellent.
Robert White, Witney, Oxon.

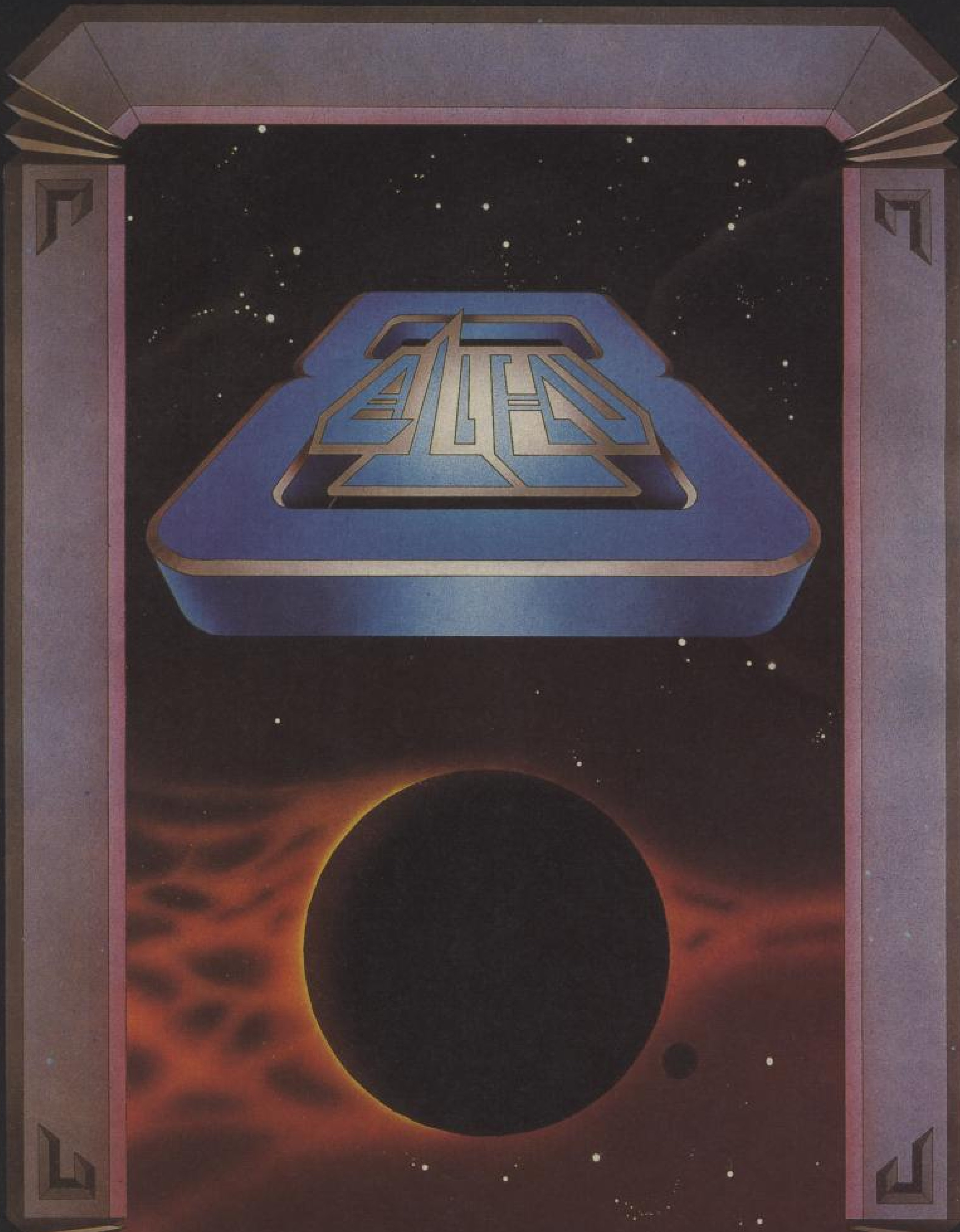
Quite a few points there, and here are my personal comments. Obviously the Hall of Slime is a bit of fun rather than a deadly serious business, though not a joke, I would say. The logistics of actually organising the enormous amount of incoming scores under game headings is frightening! Another point against it is that each hi-scorer expects to see his or her name and address for the score claimed. If, as many do, people send in scores for ten or more games, there would be more names and addresses than hi-scores using your solution.
The Playing Tips section is being slightly reorganised with Robin Candy taking care of it, and I believe he's intending to do more or less what you have suggested.
The trouble with Top sales charts, is which do you believe? They all differ dramatically. Lots of them are artificial in as much as they reflect wholesales rather than retail (ie. what the distributors want to see selling rather than what actually is selling). Perhaps the most reliable is the Gallup, but its monthly schedules don't always fit those of CRASH, and the results would probably be late. As is made clear, our Hotline does not reflect sales but popularity, and as such we believe it has its own peculiar value not only to readers but also to software houses.
An increase in general articles is definitely on the cards I'm told, but I would have thought, in comparison to other magazines, CRASH already contained a fair amount of such. On the face of it, the idea of clumping reviews, competitions, articles etc, seems like a logical and sensible one. Unfortunately it leads to a very compartmentalised structure of the magazine which can become leaden and uninteresting to read. The modern trend in magazine design has been away from logical groupings for the sake of livening up design. As to ads for CRASH magazine, there is usually only the subscription ad and a small one for back numbers, both of which are vital to the magazine, and very useful for readers.
Anyway, thanks for the ideas, some of which, as you can see, we are considering.
LM

Each month I'll be choosing the best letter from the postbag, and, as well as publishing it, **I'll send the writer £12 worth of software** *of his or her choice (it can be two cassettes as long as they come within the £12). I've had to grovel on bended knee to the editor for this, so you'd better be grateful!*
Send your letters to **Lloyd Mangram, CRASH Forum, PO Box 10, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1DB.** *I can't promise to print everything that comes in because space is precious (I'm told) but I'll do my best.*



BUG-BYTE LTD Mulberry House, Canning Place, Liverpool L1 8JB Tel: 051-709 7071

48K SINCLAIR ZX SPECTRUM



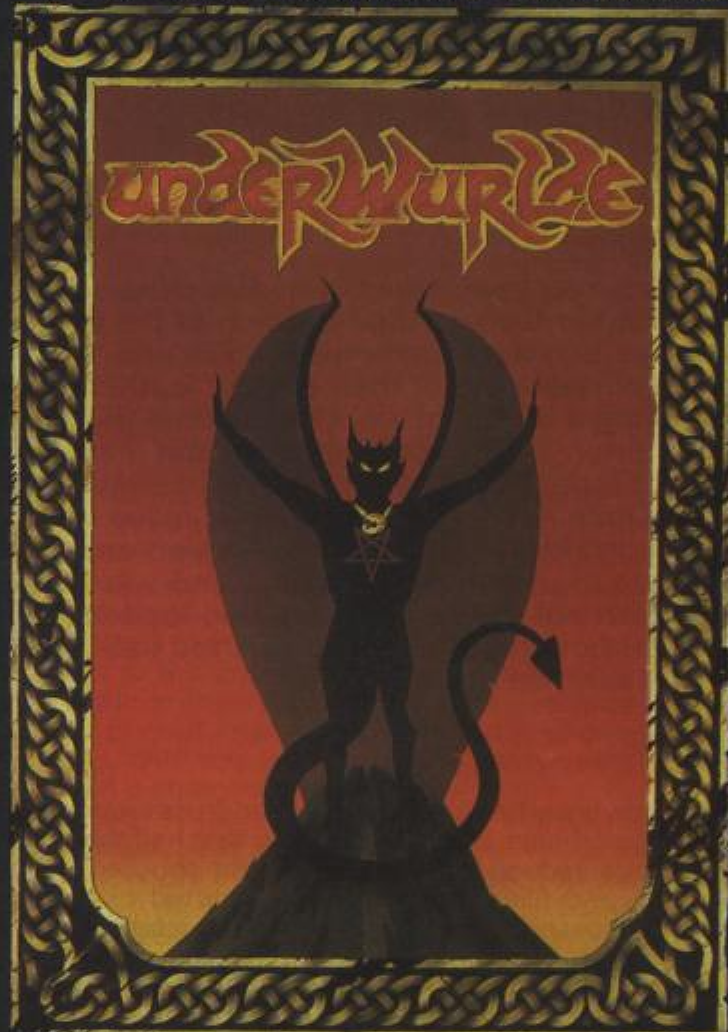
"ALIEN 8" recommended retail price £9.95 inc VAT
Available from W.H.SMITHS, BOOTS, J.MENZIES, WOOLWORTHS
and all good software retail outlets. Also available from
ULTIMATE PLAY THE GAME, The Green, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Leicestershire LE6 5JU
(P&P included) Tel: 0530 411485

ULTIMATE
PLAY THE GAME

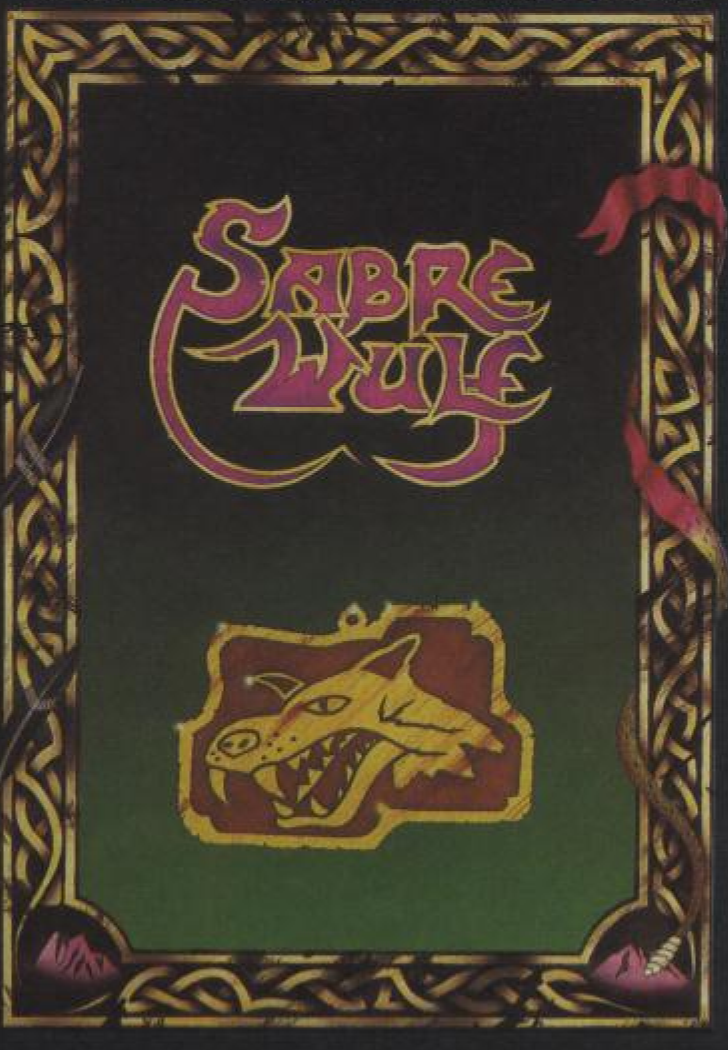
48K SINCLAIR ZX SPECTRUM



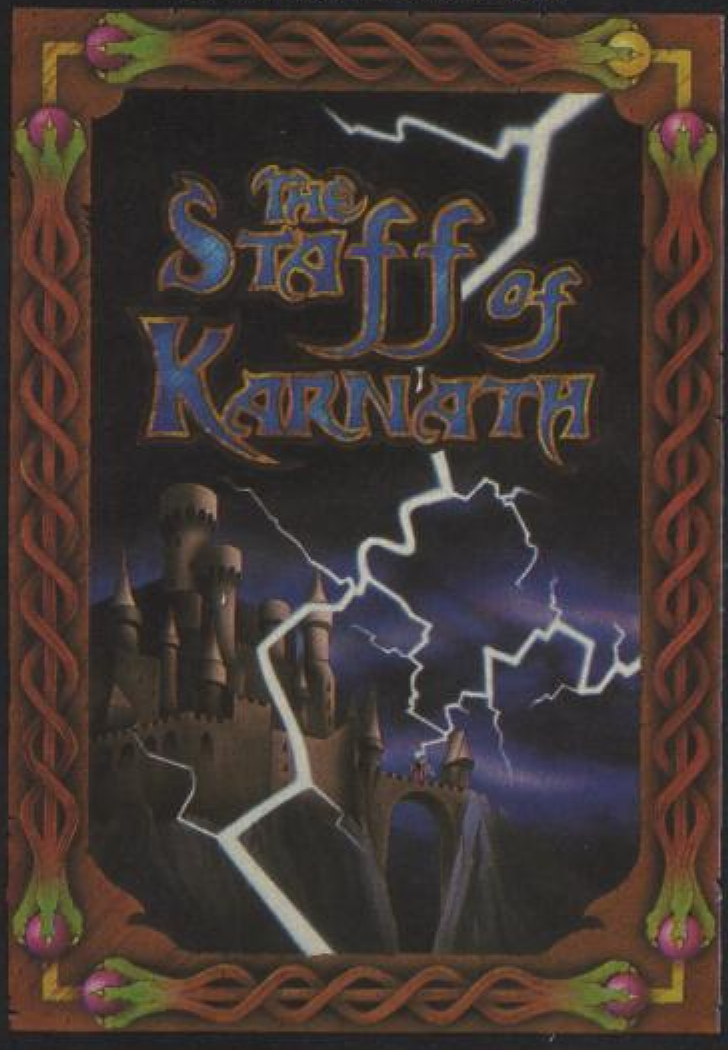
48K SINCLAIR ZX SPECTRUM



BBC MODEL B 1·2 OS
48K SINCLAIR ZX SPECTRUM



COMMODORE 64



"KNIGHTLORE", "UNDERWURLDE", "SABRE WULF", and "STAFF OF KARNATH" recommended retail price £9.95 inc VAT. Available from W.H.SMITH, BOOTS, J.MENZIES, WOOLWORTHS and all good software retail outlets. Also available from ULTIMATE PLAY THE GAME, The Green, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Leicestershire LE6 5JU (P&P are included) Tel: 0530 411485

STRIPED SUITS AND BOWLER HATS

If you've ever been taken in by the office-set brigade who, clad in the pinstripe uniform of the City, whisk into the 9 o'clock commuter train and whip their Epson portable out of their elegant leather briefcase, managing a lap full of work by the time the train gets to Waterloo, now's your chance to join them (and lick them). Forget boasting about the Wordstar, Lotus 1-2-3 and Open Access mumbo jumbo, leave that to the grown-up kids with their IBM's, Apricots and Olivettis. Get your photon-damaged and laser-blasted Spectrum out of the cupboard and load *Mini Office*, the next best thing since mini-skirted nail-varnishing private assistants. . . .

Heck, anybody has heard about wordprocessors, databases and spreadsheets. Everybody knows that half the office staff gets made redundant, typewriters get chucked out of the window, and filing cabinets get converted to drinks bars. Word processors, sure they create neat, intelligent and tidy letters (even if a dumb blonde types them in), Database prevents you from mixing up your girl- or boy-friend's phone numbers, spreadsheets help managing directors create a false rosy vision for the future when a larger bank facility (Corniches cost a fortune!) is required from the forever doubtful bank managers and the graphics help visualise the great con-tricks. Sure, everybody needs computing power in the office, even if it costs an arm and a leg. The software alone can set you back anything between £600 and £2000, but think of the savings in time and salaries. The secretary, who used to type out your hand-written or dictated letters, will now be able to handle all the mail-outs, keep the files updated and still have enough time to make your coffee. But how do these programs actually work and why does the suave secretary manage to keep her boss so happy and yet look so unruffled, why does the boss think the world of her floppies and why does he succeed in his wily ways without ever dropping a boob or creating a major flop, why does the bank manager fall for the bait and still manage to feel quietly confident and happy about it, who monitors the drinks-infested filing cabinet and where does all the booze go to, and why doesn't anyone get killed by flying typewriter-debris. . . .

The answer to these and many more questions can be found in this article, which accidentally was produced on a word processor. No, not by a secretary nor has anyone been seen near the filing cabinet.

To help answer all these formidable questions, Database software has come up with a truly olympic feat: *Mini Office* replaces the traditional doll's house and provides the back-up for an entertaining office game for the price of a mere **5.95**. The idea of the game is not to imitate the big boys and girls in the office, but to get the hang of some of the facilities offered by the automated office. This includes a word processor, a spread sheet and graphics facility. That these disciplines can be performed so well on the 48K Spectrum, is a compliment to Database. Serious users and particularly small businesses may well want to use the program in earnest, but the limitations come with the existing Spectrum hardware. It is for this reason that *Mini Office* only caters for 32 column wide printers such as the original ZX printer or the more dependable Alphacom 32. *Mini Office* does not provide an output facility for 80 column printers via an aftermarket Centronics interface, so the field is left clear for the ubiquitous *Tasword II* to clear up the 'professional' applications. *Mini Office* comes in cassette form and storage of textfiles is via the cassette medium. While this should not be a great handicap in respect of loading and saving time for a medium sized letter, the user can quite easily convert *Mini Office* to microdrive and so gain faster access to his or her files. Database is quite clearly marketing *Mini Office* as an educational program and with this in mind it has generated a program for the basic hardware configuration.

PROCESSING WORDS

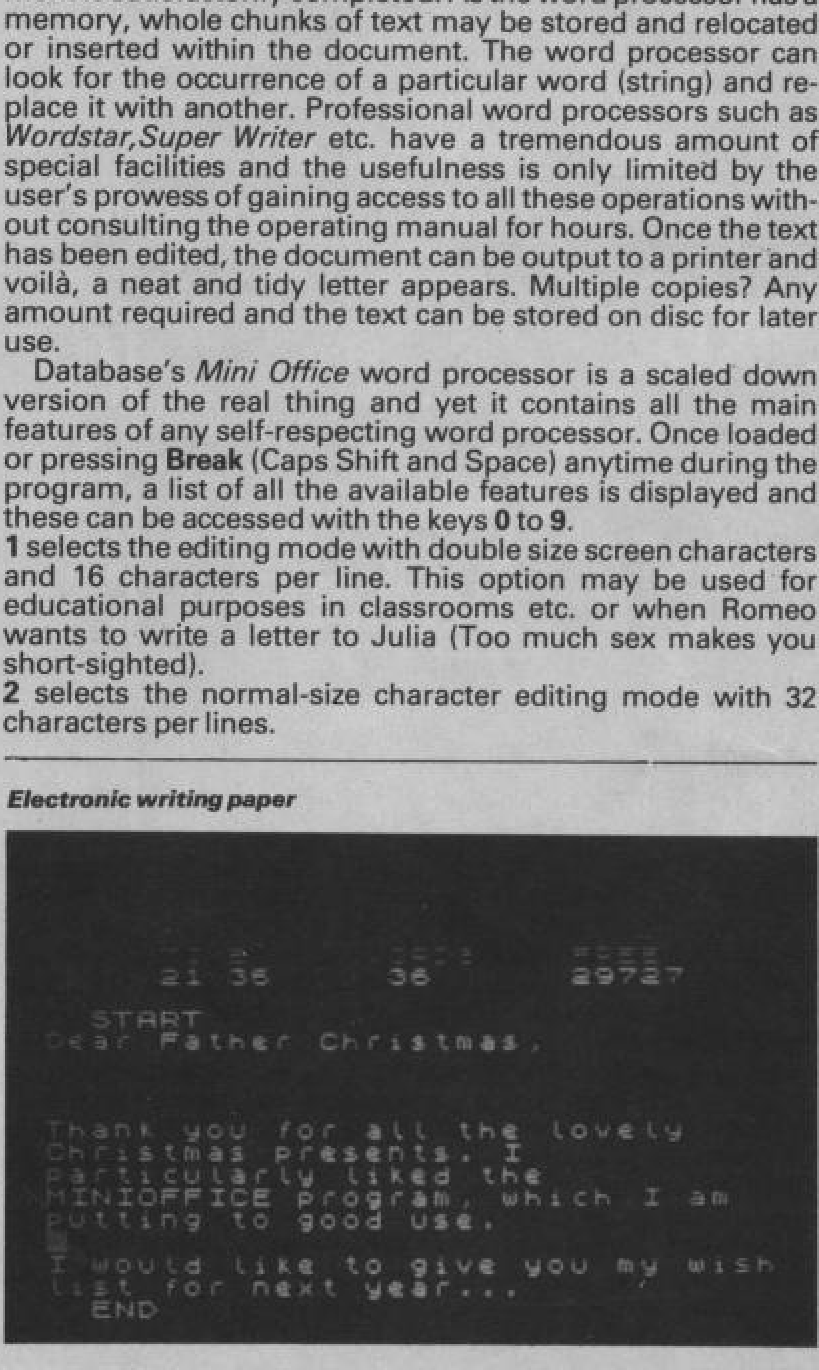
If you write a letter or report, you usually have to be very careful not to change your mind about something you've already written, or not to just clumsily make a typing error, as the correction with Tippex will always look a mess. With a word processor the entire creation of the document is made on screen, not on hardcopy. This means that any errors can be erased and modifications written until the entire document is satisfactorily completed. As the word processor has a memory, whole chunks of text may be stored and relocated or inserted within the document. The word processor can look for the occurrence of a particular word (string) and replace it with another. Professional word processors such as *Wordstar,Super Writer* etc. have a tremendous amount of special facilities and the usefulness is only limited by the user's prowess of gaining access to all these operations without consulting the operating manual for hours. Once the text has been edited, the document can be output to a printer and voilà, a neat and tidy letter appears. Multiple copies? Any amount required and the text can be stored on disc for later use.

Database's *Mini Office* word processor is a scaled down version of the real thing and yet it contains all the main features of any self-respecting word processor. Once loaded or pressing **Break** (Caps Shift and Space) anytime during the program, a list of all the available features is displayed and these can be accessed with the keys **0** to **9**.

1 selects the editing mode with double size screen characters and 16 characters per line. This option may be used for educational purposes in classrooms etc. or when Romeo wants to write a letter to Julia (Too much sex makes you short-sighted).

2 selects the normal-size character editing mode with 32 characters per lines.

Electronic writing paper



Pressing option **1** or **2** will display your 'writing paper' on screen. In the middle of the screen there is a Start and End displayed which marks the beginning and end of the document. The text to be written will sit between these two markers. To keep you on tenterhooks, three values are displayed at the top of the screen and are constantly updated. The total edit time that has elapsed, the number of words written and the number of characters that can be keyed in before the memory is full. Pressing **Caps Shift** and **3** in editing mode will compute the typing speed in words per minutes for the present text file based on the number of words in the file and the total time spent in the editing mode. These values are saved with the text file so that the correct typing speed can be shown for a particular file when created over several editing sessions.

3 selects the printer option. Several formatting parameters may be chosen. These include the number of characters per line (between 5 and 32), the width of the left margin in character widths and the character size bearing in mind the overall limitation of 32 character widths, paged mode with a selected number of page lines and display of the page number. Paged mode will take into account any end-of-page markers inserted in the text with **Caps Shift** and **9**. If paged mode is not selected, then page end markers are ignored and printing is continuous.

The text may be previewed on screen with the chosen format, although only with normal character size. The preview can be interrupted and restarted by pressing any key. For the actual print-out there are 3 different print character sizes to choose from, normal, double-height, double-height and double-width characters. This together with an alternative character set (option **9**) enables up to 6 different character styles to be used. There is no provision for print commands within the text, so the individual styles cannot be freely mixed within one print-out.

4 enables the Tab key to be set. There are four tab values and these have to be selected in ascending order. Once set, the Tab key in editing mode (**Symbol Shift**) will move the cursor to the next closest column position to the right of the cursor.

Option **5,6** and **7** enable the saving, verifying and loading of the created text to and from cassette. The text file requires a title for saving. No merge facility is available, so a document cannot be assembled by loading several existing text files. A text file in the working area will be destroyed when loading a file from tape.

8 is a help facility and enables all the editing functions to be reviewed for consultation.

9 replaces the normal Spectrum character set with a more bold face. The special face is very appealing and much more readable. Although the character sets may be toggled to and fro, practice will show that the special face will be used most of the time, as the printout on the ZX printer and the Alphacom 32 is much stronger and more readable with this face.

0 erases the file in memory and this action is secured with a confirmation request prior to the execution.

In editing mode, all the editing functions are obtained by pressing **Caps Shift** and key. **5,6,7** and **8** represent the cursor controls,**0** is the character delete key, **3** displays the typing speed, **2** is the Caps Lock key and **Symbol Shift** represents the Tab key. **4** enables a section of text to be copied to the cursor position. The destination point for the copied text is located with the cursor in position and **Caps Shift 4** pressed. Next the cursor is positioned to the start of the text to be copied and the Copy key (**Caps Shift 1**) pressed. This displays the line of text to be copied at the top line of the screen. By pressing the Copy key repeatedly the text will be copied character by character to the required location. The left and right cursor controls move the line of text being copied. The rest of the keys behave normally, inserting text at the current cursor point. **Caps Shift 4** kills the Copy function.

The functions supplied, although very limited, are sufficient for general word processing use and the access to the various functions is excellent. This enables the user to get acquainted with the program within minutes and this is sometimes more useful in a program than a large library of hidden functions. It is however a pity that no find-and-search facility has been provided, as this can prove rather useful at times.

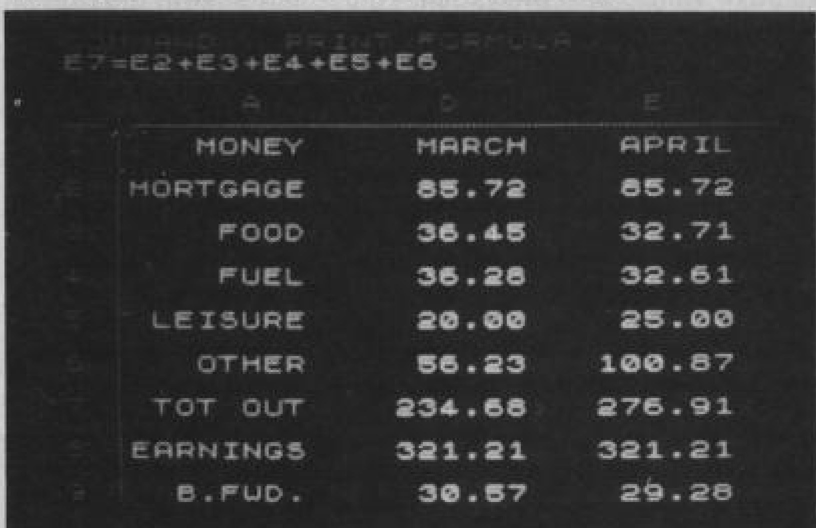
ELECTRONIC FILING CABINETS

You need more than a power cord to convert your filing cabinet into a powerful Database. Your girlfriend's (or boyfriend's) particulars are probably stored in alphabetical order of surname and if you want to examine Koo's statistics, you will find the record under the main heading S and the file name Stark. If you can't remember her surname, you had better cut back on the amount of friends you have, as you will not be able to find the record unless you go through the entire filing cabinet. The database program enables you to find a record using any particular from the record as a search parameter. In the unlikeley event of knowing two different Koos (not KooKoos), you may include the colour of her eyes in the search parameter. If you are considering throwing a party, you may extract a list of all suitable friends (young, entertaining and attractive), but important is that all these details are stored under individual fields in the database. It is important to this purpose that when the database is initially set up, all the search parameters are considered and separate fields for all these pieces of information created. These fields are all linked to the one record. They can be either of the numeric or the string type. On a sort the records will be displayed or printed in alphabetical or numeric order of the selected field. With this in mind getting started on the database program is straightforward.

The structure of the record has to be set up. Selecting option **B** (**Setup New File**) from the menu the program requests the amount of fields per record. Each field is given a name such as **NAME ,ADDRESS, EYECOLOUR, ENTERTAINVALUE** etc. For each field the type and the amount of characters has to be entered. A summary of the record structure is displayed and amendments can be effected. The structure size determines the amount of records that can be stored within the memory area and this together with the number of records already entered is displayed at the bottom of the menu. At any time the field structure can be called up using option **D** (**Field Summary**). The records are entered with option **C** (**Add Records**). The records can be listed with option **F**. Start and end record may be input and the first record will de displayed. Pressing **N** will allow you to move to the next record. Pressing **A** will allow you to alter the displayed record, pressing **D** will delete it. **M** will return you to the menu. Should Koo decide to change her address, the record may be modified directly from the menu screen with option **E**.

Unlike the word processor program *DBASE* offers the possibility of replacing a given string or a part-string in a field for another new one (option **H**). What makes the database program stand out is the powerful *field search* (option **G**) and *multi-field sort* facility (option **I**), which provides fast access to individual records. The search parameter can be any of the record's field contents. If the field-type selected is a string, the program will search for any record containing a field with the characters identical to the search parameter. If however you

The display corner of the vast spreadsheet landscape



want all the friends listed who have **blue** eyes, the program will not find the friends with **dark-blue** or **light-blue** or **baby-blue** eyes. To include these as well, the search can be made for a part-string **blue**, and the program will trap any record containing amongst other things the character sequel **blue**. For a numeric field there are four options. A search can be made for a specific numeric value, for a value greater or smaller than the parameter or for values between a given set of parameters. Similar to a filing cabinet system the records can be sorted into numerical or alphabetical order of any given field or fields, but at a fraction of the time. Up to 4 different fields can be used simultaneously in order of priority and the sort can be done in ascending or descending order. The records may be examined afterwards by listing the records in their new order. Option **J** provides the facility for storing the current file on tape with or without a Verify. Option **A** loads existing files from tape. Option **K** is an exit from the database program with the option of saving the current file.

Dbase is a very easy to use and should demonstrate well the capabilities of a good general purpose database program. The amount of records that can be stored is considerable and operating with a large amount of records demonstrates the power of the program over conventional filing systems. At the same time the user learns that the setting up of the record structure should be carefully planned, so that maximum access can be gained to the individual records. Not all filing systems are worth converting to database format. A telephone directory will not benefit at all, as the access is always via the same field (**Name**) and in this case searching for a telephone number may prove to be more time consuming with a computer than with a proper telephone diary, especially if the database program has to be loaded first!

GRAPHICAL ILLUSIONS

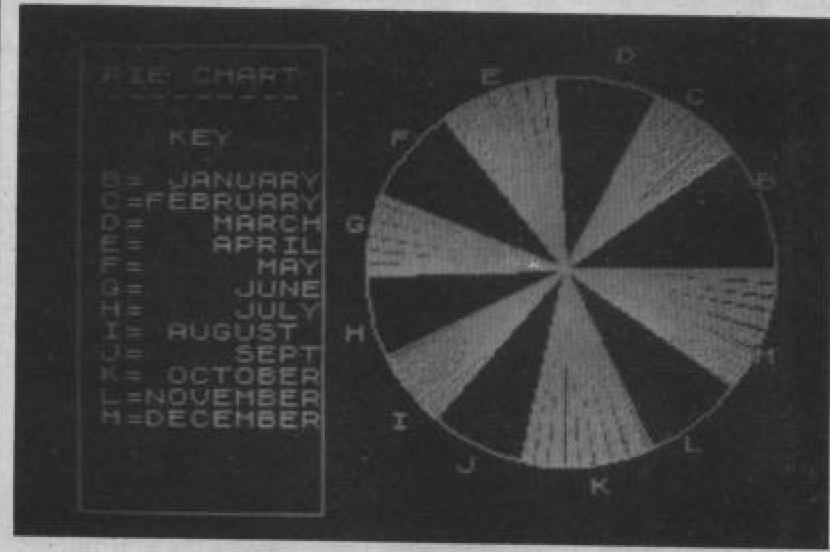
The graphics program is an extended facility of the spreadsheet and can only be used with the datafiles created from the spreadsheet program. It can be loaded from within the spreadsheet program or directly from Basic. The spreadsheet file name must be entered, the datafile loaded and the row number of the row to be displayed to be entered. Pressing **Enter** at this stage will display all the row labels of the spreadsheet so that the right selection can be made. Next the program requires a decision on which columns are to be included in the graph. With all this information, the program displays the graph menu.

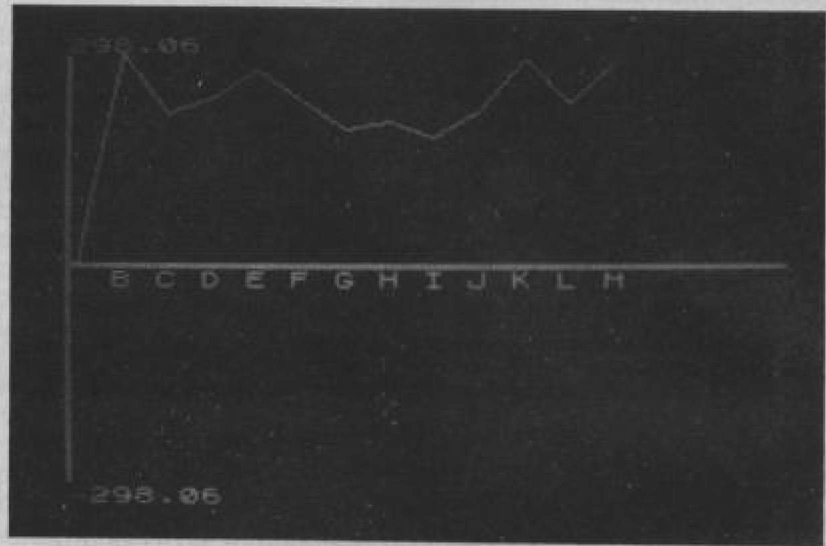
Graph provides three types of diagrams. In true business style there is a histogram, which is an excellent three--dimensional bar chart, the obligatory pi-chart (a piece of cake!) and the conventional X-Y graph. All three graphs are very well executed and give even the most absurd results a professional appearance. No values are displayed in either of the graphs with the exception of the X-Y graph, which indicates maxima and minima.

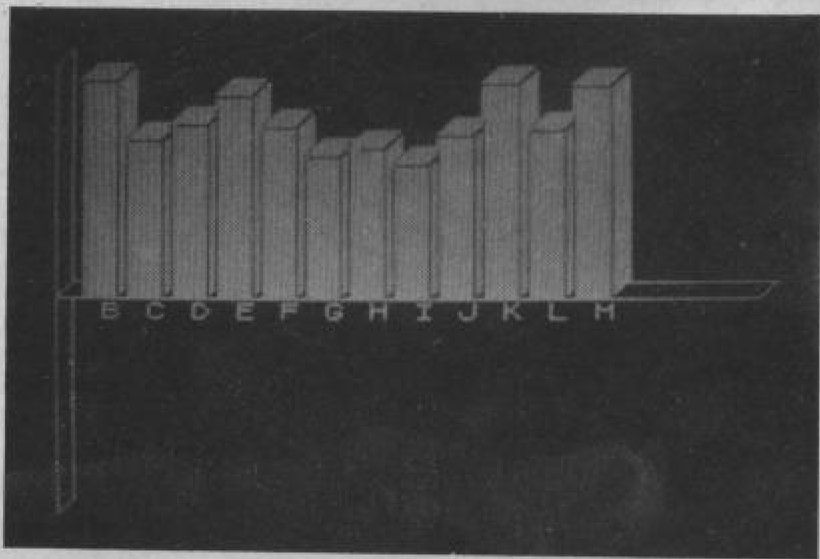
The menu does provide an information option, which displays a table of all columns together with their absolute and relative values and their total. This together with the graphs can be printed out with option **8** of the menu. Processing further rows is done with option **5**, which provides a new selection. Similarly a new spreadsheet data file may be loaded from tape with option **6** or if completed, spread sheet may be reloaded for further calculations.

The four programs *Word, Dbase, Spread* and *Graph* are clearly explained in a 32 page cassette-size manual and sample datafiles are supplied for *Dbase, Spread* and *Graph. Mini Office* offers an excellent introductory business package for the uninitiated. Similar to the emergence of the low-cost ZX81 in a high-price home computer market **Database** has cut a lot of corners at the design stage to allow a rock bottom entry level into business software for anyone owning a Spectrum. And yet the programs can be used in earnest within the limitations of the basic Spectrum computer. Anyone seriously interested in joining the grey Epson brigade or intending participating in the office revolution, should read this booklet and practice with the programs on offer. Three things will emerge from the experience gained. Although the word processor does save quite some time over the conventional method, somebody has to still key in the same amount of text as before. The same goes for the database. The program can only output so much information as has been input by the user in the first place. But if the hungry database is fed regularly with the required dosage, it will reward the user with an enormous wealth of print-outs, which would not be possible on a manual basis. This leads to the third point. The office world seems to be heading towards a paperless future. This may be true, but with programs such as word processors, databases, spreadsheets and graphics at one's fingertips the chances are that the printer paper will be piling up high and fast on your desk-top.

Program: Mini Office
Producer: Database
Memory required: 48K
Retail Price: £5.95
Author: T. Williams







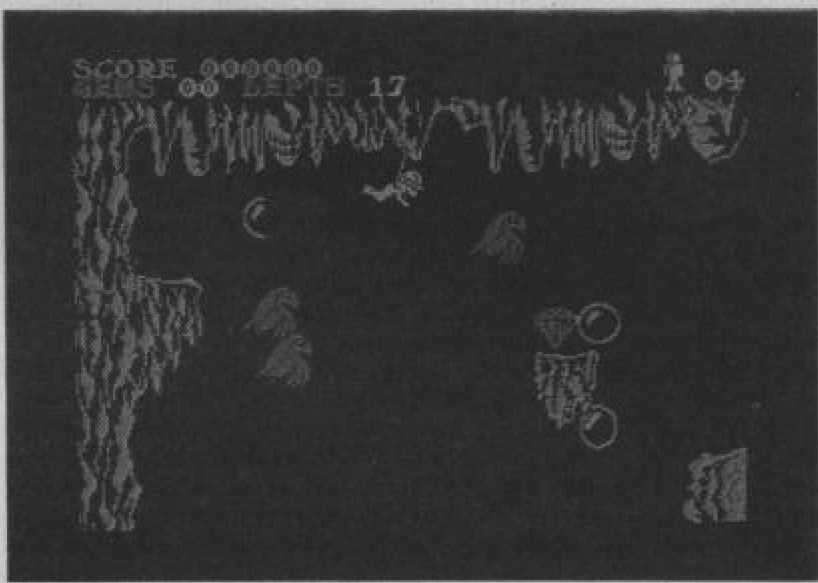
Bar, Pi, and X-Y charts for everyone

Robin Candy's

PLAYING TIPS



After a few months of moaning LLOYD MANGRAM, he who is underworked and overpaid, has managed (with help from the Oli Bugs of course) to press gang some poor dumb reviewer (namely myself) into lightening his (almost non-existent) workload. So here I am writing the Playing Tips.



It was inevitable after the somewhat undramatic arrival of the two new Ultimate games that CRASH would be swamped with letters from arcade supremos willing to help you and me on these two fab games. Luckily for me and my typewriter, most of the letters were very similar, but before I give you the tips on how to master UNDERWURLDE and KNIGHTLORE, I've been told by the people in reception that some of you have been having problems with the LUNAR JETMAN poke in my POKES CORNER from the Christmas Special, but I must tell you that there is no point phoning me up at CRASH before 4.15 pm about pokes problems because there is this stupid little law which stipulates that I have to go to school five days a week.

Anyway, I've dug out this poke for *Lunar Jetman* **sent in by** Samuel March. **I can't guarantee that it will work because I haven't had enough time to check it out** *(he spends so much time at the drinks machine* —**LM***)*.

```
20 POKE 23693,71: CLEAR
   32767
30 INK 0: FOR a – 1 TO 4:
   PRINT AT 6,0: LOAD ""
   CODE: NEXT a
40 POKE 23439,201
50 RANDOMIZE USR
   23424
60 LOAD "" CODE
70 POKE 43150,10:    PRINT
USR 32768
```

Now onto some tips for *Underwurlde* **as sent in by** Glenn White **of Portsmouth, who writes:**

To pass the guardian with the horn on its head you need the bow and arrows. To pass the guardian that looks like an earwig, you need to shoot it with the sword. Both of these can be found in and around the caves but not always in the same place.

Also on *Underwurlde* C.C. Beardah **of Derbyshire forwarded us a map of the game which will be entered into the map competition. He also offers tips for irate players.**

There are four weapons scattered about the maze. You start with the catapult in the initial room and must find the others to be able to pass the three guardians. The bow gets rid of the horned guardian, the sword gets rid of the beetle guardian and the torch gets rid of the devil. However, finding these weapons is not easy because they are arranged in different places most games (except the catapult which is always in the same place). But as with the pieces of the Amulet in *Sabre Wulf*, there is order to the madness. When you finally pass the last guardian (the devil) there are quite a few spare men waiting in the upper reaches of the castle. One of the keys to successfully completing *Underwurlde* is your use of the gems and remember that time is ticking away faster when you are falling. Finally there are three exits from *Underwurlde* and each one tells of a different game, so it looks as though there are going to be at least five adventures for our hero, Sabreman.

Well that should help anybody having problems on *Underwurlde*, **but now onto some tips for** *Knight Lore* **from** Chris Colesell, **he of** *Sabre Wulf* **poke fame:**

When jumping over things and where you have to drop objects, press jump and collect together and you should have jumped over the obstacle but still have the object credited to you. It takes time to get used to doing this, but when you have finally got the knack of doing it, it proves very useful. Also on *Knight Lore* when you enter a room with the wizard in it, you must be Sabreman or a spell will come out of the cauldron and attack you. If you are Sabreman, then the cauldron will flash the object you have out into it.

Well that just about rounds it up for *Underwurlde* **and** *Knight Lore*, **so it's on to some other games. This month's post seems to have fallen into four broad categories – tips for Ultimate's new games, tips for** *Skool Daze*, **tips for** *Avalon* **and finally tips on how to completely finish off** *Pyjamarama* **and get yourself prepared for the follow-up,** *Life of Wally*. **But first some tips for** *Skool Daze* **as sent in by** Marc O'Brien **of Wiltshire:**

In geography, sometimes there are too many kids and you keep getting lines from Mr. Withit because other kids keep knocking you off your chair. To stop getting lines when Mr. Withit enters the room, follow him to the end of the room and Mr. Withit will turn around and start teaching the class without noticing you standing behind him. Also, here are some of the dates of battles as mentioned by Mr. Creak:

Shrewsbury 1403
Poitiers 1356
Sedgemore 1685
Hastings 1066
Trafalgar 1805
Balaclava 1854
Yorktown 1781
Evesham 1265
Lexington 1775
Borodino 1812
Ledanto 1571
Flodden 1513

*(Good grief! I turn my back for two seconds and the damned thing's turning into a history lesson! -***LM***)*

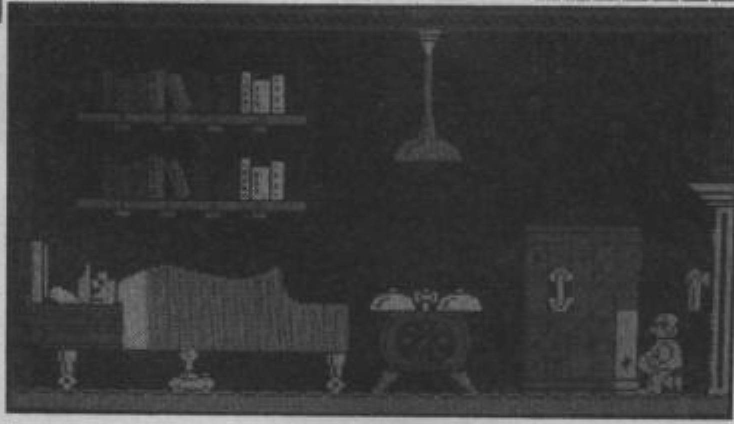
Shut up, Lloyd. Also on the subject of *Skool Daze*, Jamie Samath **of Swindon writes:**

At playtime, if some little boy tells you that SWOT is going to the Head's office to tell on you, then quickly run to the stairs on the bottom floor to the right. You will see SWOT coming down the stairs from the fire escape. Now all you have to do is just beat him up until lessons start again.

Well that sounds like fun to me, anyway, Jamie goes on to say:

When in the Reading Room always sit at the back because none of the other kids try to sit at the back, so you won't get pushed off the seat, and that way you don't

PLAYING TIPS



get any lines either.

All the shields on the top floor can be got by jumping at them, all the shields on the middle floor can be got by knocking a kid over and then jumping on him, and all the shields on the bottom floor can be got by knocking over a teacher then getting a catapult to bounce off the teacher's head, thus hitting a shield.

Well those are all the tips I've got for *Skool Daze* at the moment. It seems to be one of the most sadistic games available what with knocking teachers over and beating up other kids (well everyone seems to enjoy doing that sort of thing). Now onto a much more peaceful game *Avalon*, which seems to have brought with it a multitude of tips, but first this one from John Harris **of Leicester**:

On the Gatehouse level, just find yourself the servant then together look for the small key which you can collect by walking over it. Keep it in your rucksack. Later when you find the chest in the room , use your servant with the small key to open the chest, which contains a large key. This will open a door that leads to a tunnel. The tunnel leads to a main room that contains many doors. The doors lead to the Caverns of Doom where warriors throw things at you. **(almost as hospitable as Lloyd Mangram** -RC) Alternatively you can go to the Mines of Madness. You will find new objects to collect. Warning: there are scorpions in bottles which attack you if you release them, but in some bottles there are keys.

Steve Ridge **of Hemel Hempstead explains the mystery of the materialising warlock that appears in the first room**:

Give objects to the warlock who occasionally appears. He will (as well as firing the odd thunderbolt at you) give you a flashing star. Get the servant to place this star on the white star which appears in the second room and the star will change. If you now move Maroc over this star, his energy will be replenished. There are one or two other objects which can also raise you energy, one being under a mattrapdoor. The purple fish are just red herrings so leave them alone. Hammers can be used to break or move objects.

Now onto the complete solution to *Pyjamarama* as sent in by hundreds of other people all proclaiming that they were the first to complete this fab game. The first people I head of completing *Pyjamarama* were way back in mid--October, so anyone later than that were no way near being the first! Anyway, onto the final solution, which was sent in by Robert Nelsan **of Northumberland. I chose his version because it was easier to understand than most others (we CRASH employees only have simple minds).** *(Speak for yourself* -**LM**)

1) Follow BARRY JORDAN's tips from the December issue of CRASH.
2) To get the scissors get the ignition keys then slide down the bannister to get the crash helmet. When you have got the crash helmet get the library ticket and exchange this for the library book. The combination of the crash helmet and the library book will allow you to get the scissors.
3) Well, Wally, with that done you now have to put the HELP button ON, which makes a tea chest appear in the room with the box key.
4) O.K., Wally, you now have to go to the room with the box key and balloon in it (making sure you've still go the scissors) and touch the balloon (sometimes you have to go back round and put the HELP back ON). The balloon will take Wally up, so all you have to do now is jump along and get the box key.
5) Go to the kitchen and you can now swap the box key for the magnet.
6) Well, Wally, with that done the rest is simple (?) Go to the moon, where you have previously left a full laser gun, walk into the next room and jump at the magnetic lock and the bars guarding the clock key will disappear. Collect the clock key and make your way back to the clock avoiding the various little nasties. Touch the clock and you've completed the game (though you may not receive 100%).

Well that should help all you proper Wallies out there still having problems with *Pyjamarama*

Many people have written in on how to get to level 2 or 3 on *Kokotoni Wilf* without having to go through the previous level(s) by pressing either 2 or 3 before you start a game. Well we at CRASH knew about this feature before the game was actually released because Elite built it in for CRASH because we said it would be better that after you had completed a level you were given a code so you could skip that level next go (like *Wheelie* and *Skyranger*). Sadly Elite misunderstood us and built in a feature so you could start straight away on level 2 or 3 without even bothering to look at the other levels. Also, many have enquired about a demo on *Kokotoni Wilf*. The truth is there isn't one, our copy was a special program made up of SCREENS from the game so we could take photos from later levels without having to waste hours getting there.

Here is a quickie from Chris Rolurson **of Durham on** *Orc Attack*:

If you have several orcs coming up any ladder at the same time, you will find that if you keep in exactly the same position after killing the first orc then all the subsequent orcs will be killed by just one swing of the sword.

And here's a poke sent in by Piers Pettman **of Amersham, Bucks, which disables your fire on** *Jetpac*! **Well, I'm sure someone will find it useful!**

POKE 28784,0

Well that just about rounds it up for the Playing Tips this month, but before I go, here are a couple of tips for the fantastic *Doomdark's Revenge*, which I have completed and revealed the Watchwords of Midnight (do I hear Derek Brewster gnashing his teeth in the background)? MORKIN can be found around the city of Imireal, which is Shareth's home, but getting to the city presents some problems because it is surrounded by the icy wastes, so getting there is difficult. All I will say is that you get there by going through a tunnel. I'm not telling which one for fear of Derek. Also Shareh hangs out around the city of Glireon and she can be slain in battle (sometimes independent characters do it for you). Of the five races in Icemark I find the Giants are the least reliable, and so far I have recruited about 65 characters.

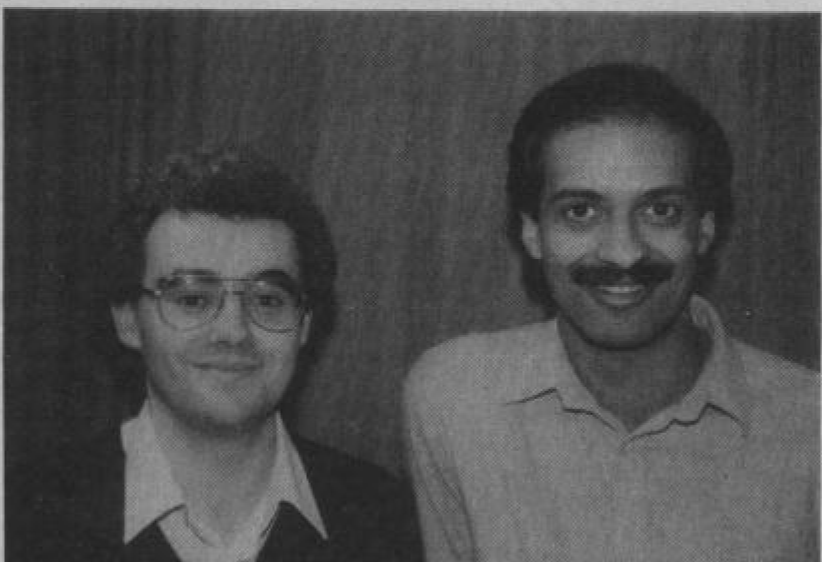
Well, that's it for this month, I hope you liked it. Write to me at ROBIN CANDY'S PLAYING TIPS, CRASH, PO BOX 10, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE SY8 1DB, and tell me all your snippets on how to cheat at games and other useful tips.

Making silicon chips for microprocessors isn't an easy life as the new HEWSON CONSULTANTS' game **Technician Ted** *shows. ROGER KEAN talks to ANDREW HEWSON and STEVE MARSDEN who, together with DAVE COOKE wrote* **Technician Ted**, *a CRASH SMASH this month.*



IN THE CHIP FACTORY

SINCE their emergence from the early days of the arcade copy, **Hewson Consultants** have been noted more for their thoughtful programs like *Nightflite* and *Heathrow ATC*. Even the more arcade-like games in the Seiddab trilogy by Steve Turner have been thinking games as well as shoot em ups. So it comes as a surprise to see the latest release from Hewsons, *Technician Ted*, which is an exciting platform game.



Authors of TECHNICIAN TED, are 23 year-old Dave Cooke and 21 year-old Steve Marsden

The two young programmers of *Technician Ted* are **Steve Marsden** (21) and **Dave Cooke** (23). Dave was unfortunately at work on the day that Steve and Andrew Hewson came up to Ludlow to see us. I started off by asking Steve how many games he had written.

'It's the first commercial program. We've written an assembler, which is for our own use really, and in fact we've written this game with our assembler.'

'Have you written any other games before that haven't been published?'

'No, this is really the very first game. We've been writing machine code routines over the last four months before we wrote this game like the music routines for it.'

'The music is quite prominent.'

'The main interest we've got is in the hardware side and in electronic music, so that's quite important.'

Both Steve and Dave work for a giant electronics firm which, as Andrew explained, is where the game idea first came from.

'It's based on the chip factory where they work in Marconi in Lincoln, a place where they make microprocessors, and one of the rooms where Steve and Dave work is the silicon slice store so they're in deep with these chips anyway and so machine code is nothing new to them.

'So you make chips for Marconi?' I asked, and then wondered whether Marconi was aware that two of their employees were 'leaking' trade secrets through a computer game. Steve gave a laugh.

'Yeah, that was a problem! we had to present the processes as they are but without letting any secrets out.'

'What do you actually do at Marconi?'

'I make silicon chips, transistors and diodes. Computers aren't a major part of my work. I'm more of a Jekyll and Hyde, with the chemicals! I didn't really have much experience of computers before we started. I've been there about two and a half years now, and Dave's been there since Christmas 83. He's an engineer.'

'Getting back to *Technician Ted*, I suppose there's an inevitable comparision to be made between it and *Jet Set Willy*. Do you mind that?'

'Well out of all the games I've ever played on the Spectrum, *Manic Miner* and *Jet Set Willy*, were the best two games I've ever played. I wanted more of that. It wasn't a question of copying those, just that those – platform games – are the sort of games I like to play, so naturally I went that way.'

'How long did it take to write?'

'Part time work we started it in March, got it finished at the end of August.'

'Do you think that like *JSW* it will lead to a rash of POKEs? Is it even possible?'

'Well we tried to put the best biasing protection in such as the tape loading routine. Somewhere in the region of 80000 calculations are performed while its actually loading to check that the machine's just switched on. The program's calculated so even if you manage to get the coding, which you can do with a tape copier, it's not the actual code anyway. That's the system, but there's still lots of people who can break that system.'

'Do you think they will?'

'I'd like to think they could do, yeah, because then we'll know where we're going wrong,' he said, adding a laugh.

'Have you got anything else in line following on?'

'Yeah, we've got a follow up to this game using the same character in a different situation, and we're developing techniques as well. We've talked about this back and forth, and we've already got material that's ahead of what's in this one.'

'How do you share the work out between the two of you?'

'Well, per byte, you can't say can you? I've looked at about 25% of the code of all the sprites and Dave's done all the rest of the code. It was a complete mixture, I would do some of the graphics and Dave would say, I'll write some of this and some of that and I would do the same thing, and I would say, well I need the code for this and he would do that. The next game is going to be a more highly organised affair, this one was a bit haphazard really. With the next one, hopefully, we can put a bit more design into it. So we

don't go off at a tangent and then we can produce the best material at the start.'

'How was *Technician Ted* programmed?'

'It was all done on the Spectrum. The graphics drawings aids are all our own programs, we assembled our own toolkit which we'll probably use again. I think digitising it would be better for graphics but on this particular game we worked completely on the keyboard.'

Andrew added,'He takes a sheet for a routine and then the routine is written out on that sheet and the interface is at the top, you know, what it's got to do, and then all that goes into a folder. Whereas Steve Turner is all hex, I don't know how he does it. Most of it's carried up here,' he said, tapping his head wonderingly.'

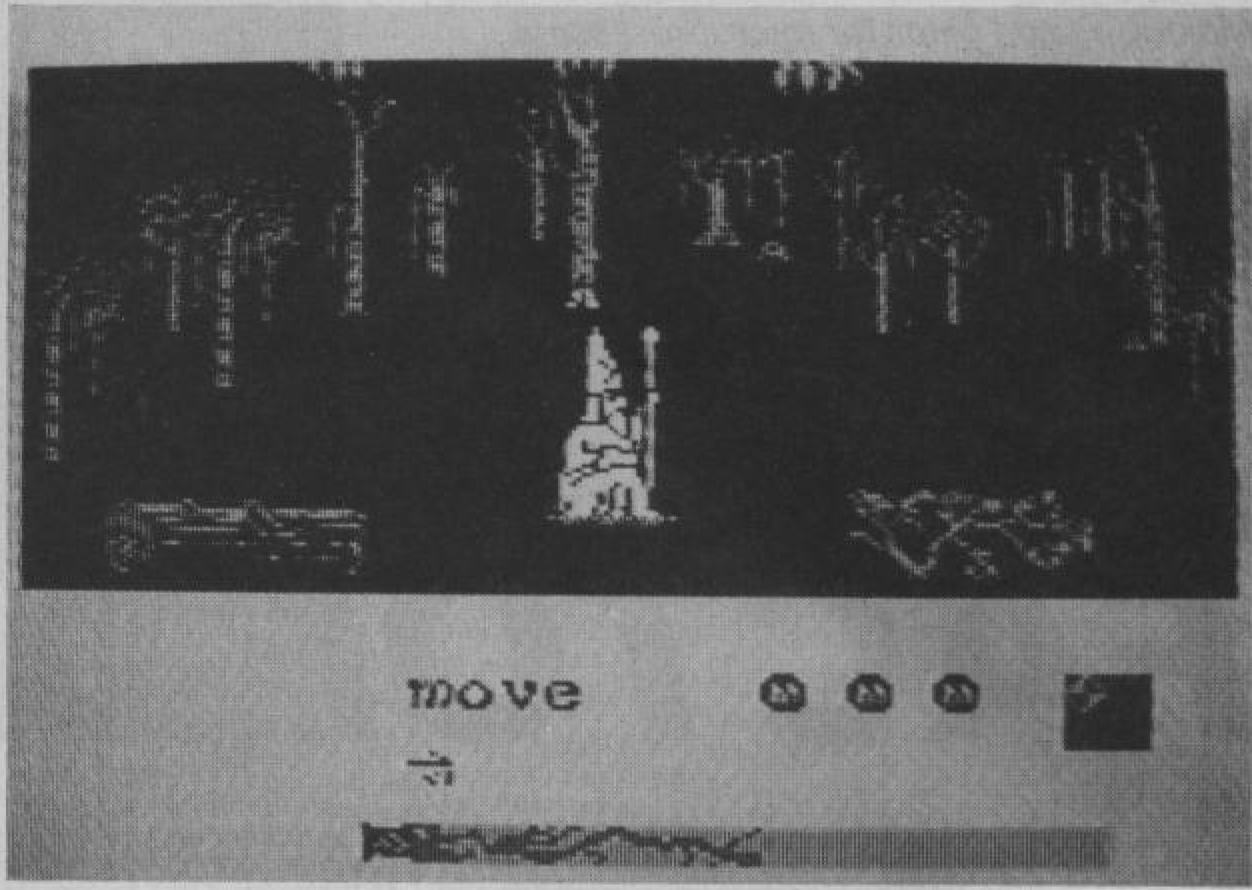
Steve drew out a long slim sheet of paper and waved it tantalisingly at me. 'We've got the solution to the game worked out, here it is.'

Refused permission to see the top secret document, I asked Andrew about playing tips.

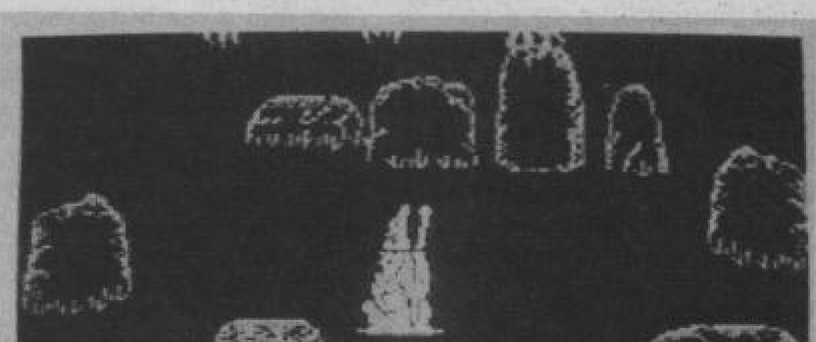
'It's very difficult really. What we've done in the instructions is that we've actually told them the first three tasks are in a certain area to get them going, because there is a definite threshold that people have to get over - not the real afficionados, but you're not selling tied to them you're selling to everyone and you want everyone to get going. With *Avalon* we've dribbled out bits here and there. We had two sorts of people, those who couldnt get off the first level, and those who were so far on we thought, My God, we didn't expect this, not so quickly.'

Talking of Steve Turner, I asked Andrew how the follow up to *Avalon was coming along. It's called The Dragontorc of Avalon*.

'*Dragontorc*? Yes it's coming along quite well. I've got a couple of screen shots here. As you can see it's mostly developments isn't it? No doors this time, instead you have stone circles and trees coming in. In a sense it's *Avalon Mk II* – there's Maroc sitting in the middle and there's other characters. He's still got his servant spell, and you're going to be given a few other spells to begin with. And this time the scenario is set rather later on. It follows on from *Avalon*, but you've got to reunite the five crowns of Britain. The enemy this time is Morag the Shape Shifter. It should hit the streets about March the 1st – that's the target date, but we'll see,' Andrew added with a hopeful shrug.



Two screens from Steve Turner's DRAGONTORC OF AVALON.







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HERE THERE BE MONSTERS!



The growth of the computer adventure games market in the latter part of 84 reflects the increasing interest of players in mind games and in fantasy games. It is probably the area where there is yet to be the most development of ideas, the uncharted continent of the psyche. In olden times when explorers were drawing maps, any large area they had been unable to visit and which remained a mystery to them was marked with the warning slogan, 'Here there be monsters'. Now the world is well charted, but adventure game programmers and scenarists are busy keeping monsters alive and kicking deep inside our computers. Foremost in the development of fantasy role playing games, wargames and adventure games is **Games Workshop,** *headed by writers* **Steve Jackson** *and* **Ian Livingstone.**

Roger Kean *visited Steve Jackson at Games Workshop's London headquarters and talked to him about the past, present and future.*

It is a timely moment to catch Steve Jackson, because any hint that his partner Ian Livingstone has been the busier of the two recently (with Ian's involvement in *Eureka!*) is firmly squashed when you see what he is up to. There's the latest in the *Fighting Fantasy* series of adventure game books just out, it's called *Talisman of Death*, the fourth and final part of the *Sorcery* series just out, plans to turn the series into a computer game, probably to be released by Penguin, and he is hard at work on the first of a brand new series of computer games with a new concept which will be coming out through **Adventure International** under *The Swordmaster* name. On top of this, together with Ian Livingstone, Steve is busy running Games Workshop with its multitude of projects, which include several computer games for release during 85.

I talked to Steve in his large but spartan office in the warehouse building that acts as Games Workshop's head quarters in Park Royal, London. First off, I asked him how the whole thing had got going and why.

'Ian and I both come from Manchester. We moved down here about twelve years ago and have never looked back. Originally we used to go to a wargame club in Manchester and I used to run a games club at the university of Keele. We got to know what was happening in games because people would come in and tell us things, so it soon became obvious we knew quite a lot about these games that nobody else had heard of. At the time *Diplomacy* was the big game, everybody used to play it by post and we played it in all night sessions, we also came across another called *The Warlord*. And then Avalon Hill wargames came out.

'But there was this guy called Don Turnbull who edited a magazine called *Albion*, which was a fanzine for boardwar games, and I got a copy of this from a friend who was a science fiction fan, and I thought, oh I must subscribe to this, and I wrote the address out and it turned out to be about a mile away from where I lived in Manchester. So I phoned the guy up and went round to see him and Ian came as well, and we got quite friendly. Ian was at college in Manchester and he got to know Don Turnbull quite well. Don was really the centre of the games hobby as it was at the time, I'm talking about 200 people scattered around the country playing games by post, and the only place you could get Avalon Hill games was Hamleys and The General Trading Company in Sloane Square.'

Both of these places were in London, and the two wargaming friends realised that there was a market, especially when the role playing games began to grow in popularity. However, university finished and Steve and Ian went their separate ways.

'I went off doing all sorts of different jobs, and then we all came together in London. Ian had moved down here with another friend and I'd just left a job looking after birds on a bird reserve. I came to London and the three of us shared this flat and that's where Games Workshop was born. It's a typical story really, one evening when we were really pissed off with all the jobs we were doing and it was getting up to Christmas, we got very drunk and we were talking about all these different things we could do, oh why don't we start up a little spare time company, and so on. We got all enthusiastic about it and all the names came out, it was going to be Games Garage, and it was gonna be Megagames Experience and all these horrible things, and Games Workshop was down on this piece of paper somewhere and that was the one that stuck.

'It started off with John, the third person in the flat, another friend from Manchester, who was a really good woodworker and he used to make chess boards and Go boards and Backgammon boards things like that and do them really well, and Ian was the salesman, he went round places like Harrods and Hamleys sold quite a few of these things, and we started getting some business coming in. At the time I was writing freelance for *Games & Puzzles* magazine, so I had contacts there who gave us some work to do for them, and that kept us busy for a few months, just about busy enough that I could leave my full time job, and start doing this full time.'

It was about this time that the big break they had hoped for came in the shape of a new fantasy role playing board game from America called *Dungeons & Dragons*

'We were absolutely obsessive about it! I mean, it contained everything we wanted – it was wargaming and fantasy all rolled together into this totally unique game system that no one had ever done before, you could get totally involved in it. We dedicated weeks and weeks to it, designing dungeons, everything. Everyone goes through this thing – when you first discover it, it is your all encompassing passion, well for some people it is for the rest of their lives! But for us it was for about 6 months. Everyone we knew who was vaguely interested in fantasy we would invite them round to play this game, and they would get obsessed with it and the whole thing snowballed. Our first order was, I think, for three copies from the States, and they were gone within two days of the order going off. So we got more of them and we started selling them and they started doing well, and suddenly Games Day was featuring D&D. We started noticing other companies in the States who were producing similar things, so we went over to the States and signed a lot of them up with distribution deals.

'We just happened to be around at the right place with the right interest at the right time. There's nothing particularly magical about it and I daresay other people would have done just the same. But we were very fortunate in that the whole thing was just getting going. We started up our own shop in Hammersmith – that was the first of many.'

FIGHTING FANTASY

Writing fantasy or writing about fantasy has been a large part of both Steve Jackson's and Ian Livingstone's careers and has led them directly into writing

computer games. Before the *Fighting Fantasy* series was developed, there was their magazine *White Dwarf*. I asked Steve how that had come about. 'You see at the time we started Games Workshop, around 75, we used to publish this fanzine called *Owl and Weasel*. Owl and Weasel it was called because those were the qualities you needed to be a good games player, you need to be wise and you need to be cunning. The first one was written in about three days and cost 40p in 1975! This got sort of tossed around, I'd be editor one month and then Ian would edit it for one month until finally Ian took over as editor all the time. We got up to about issue 25 and Ian came back one day and said, We're not going to do *Owl and Weasel*, it's going to turn into a proper magazine. He said we'll need four thousand copies, I've even got a name for it, it's called *White Dwarf*, because it's, you know, white dwarf the star and white dwarf a fantasy character. I think it was 77 when the first issue came out, and it was like everyone's first issue of a magazine, it had lots of faults and it could have been a lot better but it has evolved over the years to be, well, something that we're all proud of, and it comes out every month which is astounding! It's doing amazingly well, it's got a circulation of 42,000, doubled in the last year. You only used to be able to get it in games shops, toys shops, model shops, it was all subscriptions and our own circulation, but now we've taken the plunge and got a distributor, so it's more widely available.'

With the increasing experience gained by writing for *Owl and Weasel* and then in *White Dwarf* both Steve and Ian felt they were ready to tackle something a bit bigger, something that would involve them more creatively, and it came with the *Fighting Fantasy* books.

'Ian and I were walking through Games Day once and Penguin had just released a book called *Power Politics*. It was a book of political type games you could play with a group of people and Penguin were promoting it so they had taken a stand at Games Day. Ian and I were doing our round of the stands and we came across Geraldine Cook who was one of the editors at Penguin, and we said you ought to do something on this fantasy role playing thing, and she said, Okay, do a synopsis. And so off we went, but we offered her two different synopses. One was a book which was just a review of the fantasy games, how they worked, how you got into them, and the other was a solo adventure. It was just half a dozen sheets put together and a big picture on the front, saying there are two doors and do you want to take the one on the left, or the one on the right? And you turned to different pages and it followed through. And finally you came across a Wight, I think it was, and if you overcame it there was treasure chest in there.'

The two synopses sat around at Penguin for ages until Steve thought that Penguin had given up on them, but one day they received a phone call. The project was on.

'They had us in and there was Puffin and Penguin fighting over us – this was *Warlock of Firetop Mountain*. The problem was Puffin was saying I think it ought to be a children's book and Geraldine was saying no, no it ought to be an adult's book because it's adults that play these games. And it went back and forth and they asked us what we thought, and we said, we'll leave it to you.

'Eventually Puffin got it, and it got written, and it was a real pain to write. It's one thing to do these little things, but it's another thing to do a whole book. It's all got to branch out then come back in. We split it between us and the way we did it was that Ian did the first half of the book and I did the second half. We spent about three months doing this, typing it, it was really new writing books, so we got all this work done for the deadline and took it in and two days later Penguin were saying that they couldn't do anything with it. Our writing styles were completely different, well Ian had lots more encounters with rooms, puzzles and traps and so on, whereas I hadn't got anything like as many encounters, there were more things to do. Penguin felt that there was a real sense of moving from one into the other, so we had to go back and rewrite the whole thing and also work out the combat system which we hadn't agreed on. Anyway, it all got done and eventually came out as *Warlock* is now.'

The Warlock of Firetop Mountain was published in August 82 and promptly sold out its first print run in three weeks. Penguin immediately asked whether it couldn't be turned into a series and so *Fighting Fantasy* was born. Their experiences at writing together led Steve and Ian to writing on their own, which was hardly any slower, and the series grew. Other authors have since been drafted, and now the 11th book in the series (*Talisman of Death*) is out.

INTO COMPUTER GAMES

Neither Steve nor Ian are computer programmers, although Steve has certainly had a go.

'In the very early days when the Commodore PET just came out I bought one of these things – this is the way of the future, I thought – I didn't know anything about them and I thought I'd better find out how they worked. So I plonked about with it and got obsessed and for six months I would just go home at night and program this thing, and for six months

TOWARDS A NEW ADVENTURE GAME STYLE

Some of the ideas Steve Jackson has had for including more graphics in computer adventure games have evolved from his writing background. The *Fighting Fantasy* books are an obvious departure point and a text-only adventure is an obvious outcome, but the problems start when you want complex graphics **and** a complex program that can cope with the sort of ideas he has developed for the book versions. Tables for spell casting and for combat encounters start to get out of hand with available memory, especially if there is to be location and character description and graphics. How to overcome the problem?

It may well be that a new game, released by Adventure International and with a scenario by Steve Jackson, will provide the answer. It will be the first of a planned series under the general heading of *The Swordmaster*. How the idea first evolved is a story in itself, here Steve recalls the events of some years back.

'A long time ago, while I was working on *Sorcery* in fact — I went over to the States. We've got an office over there, and John, the fellow who actually runs it, he and I were in Washington looking around for sites for an office. It was a Sunday morning, he borrowed the car we had hired and I was left in this bed and breakfast place, right at the top in an attic. Now I only had normal clothes, just a jacket and ordinary shoes, you know, and it had been snowing the night before, and it didn't stop. It was feet deep, so I couldn't go out. The nearest shop was at least ten minutes away, and I didn't have any money either because I had given some to John as he was going off to see his family and left myself with about a dollar. So I sat down and thought what am I going to do? I've got no money for food, I can't go out anywhere — and this thing came up and this is what became Swordmaster eventually.

'It was a combat system in which you learn how to fight and you gain experience and originally it was going to a part of *Sorcery*. I thought that's great, you've got this new spell system that's never been used in a Fighting Fantasy book and you've got this new combat system as well. But it became a bit too complicated to include with everything else and I didn't want the books to get that complicated. So the idea sat around and then Games Workshop were going to use it for a solo fantasy role playing system but we couldn't decide whether it was going into a book or a whether into a box game and eventually nobody ever did anything with it.

'The way it works is that for every monster you come across you have a series of numbers. It's not really complicated, but it sounds it to explain. You've got different numbers for different monsters, the numbers are on a sliding table, so that number 20 might be, 'Leaps at you and attacks'. So you choose your own move (you can do certain things, depending on what you've done before) and you cross index these two on the scale and if you leap on him and attack and he leaps on you and attacks then you both do damage to each other. But if you're defending and he leaps on you to attack, then he doesn't do any damage to you. You can actually learn what the numbers mean, and that was the main idea — that you would learn what the numbers mean. It's a very flexible system because different monsters have different characters, that's part of it as well — there are some monsters that will race at you and attack and then get tired out and have to rest and that's when you can do your thing and go into the attack. So you've got different characters that you can build up. And because you learn it, it's very much like real fighting.

'This was the idea anyway and



work I got this little tiny routine that did some tiny aspect of Games Workshop's business, it actually worked out the VAT on mail order! That's as far as I got. And I realised that even though you could see what you had to do you had to have so much time to do anything useful on it. It was better to have an expert do it!'

The expert in question was Rob Easterby, another PET freak who had produced an early version of the Star Trek trench game.

'I know its old hat now, but at the time nobody had ever done that. And if you look at the graphics now compared to what you get today – well it was just about 8K! But it was quite a good game and everybody who came along to Games Day enjoyed it, and we released this range of six games and arranged quite a bit of advertising for them, and they bombed out completely. It was a terrible disaster! All the copies we made were on our own little PET. That was our best selling game and I think we sold about 60 of them! That was the state of the computer games market. We consoled ourselves with the fact that at least we could say we were ahead of the time. It's all happened since, but the experience made us think that if we were going back into this again, we've got to make sure we do it well.' Although it was released under Penguin/Puffin's imprint, the first of the 'new generation' Games Workshop computer games was taken from their best-selling *Warlock of Firetop Mountain*. It was programmed by Crystal. Was Steve happy with it at the time, and how did he get Crystal to do it?

'I think I can say this safely now, there was a time when I shouldn't have said this. *The Warlock of Firetop Mountain* computer game happened because Ian and I went up to Manchester to do a book fair at the library and afterwards I was buying a birthday present for my mother from Argus. And there was a queue and I had all these little leaflets under my arm – 'Introduction to Fantasy Games' – and Chris Clarke from Crystal was in the queue behind me, and he noticed the leaflets and said, Oh Introduction to Fantasy Games, and I said, oh do you want one? So we got talking, and he told me that they write computer games and how they have a game that knocks *The Hobbit* on the head and the graphics are fantastic and it works in real time. And I said, that's interesting, we're looking for a computer game which would fit the *Warlock of Firetop Mountain*. So they came down to London and showed us their *Halls of The Things* and it looked pretty good. Penguin more or less left it in our hands when we recommended this highly because it looked pretty good, state of the art as far as arcade games went, but there were things we wanted them to do – like, can you take away the maze? We don't want a maze any more, we want corridors that open up, a bit like the D&D game on Intelevision. Yes that was no problem, and change things like magic spells – they had lightning bolts, we just wanted a sword, and the monsters should be stationed in rooms, so you've actually got to enter a room and it becomes more like *Warlock*. But despite all these suggestions that we made, in the end the game that came out was a sort of version of *Halls of the Things*. Even basic things they hadn't changed like it's got strength, they hadn't changed that to stamina. It was a case of coming up to Christmas, and Penguin had paid their advance, so poor Phillipa at Penguin, who is a real hero, went up there and supposedly got an awful lot done with them, and even then it was late, so she ended up giving them a deadline that if it isn't in by next Monday the game's not coming out. And the minute it was in at Penguin it got tested and it was off for duplication into production copies. And then we said, oh let's have a look at this thing, and we said, oh this isn't anything like we said it was supposed to be like.

this was what took me from nine o'clock in the morning until midnight!, working all these tables out, making sure they all operated properly and writing up the rules for it.'

So sitting alone in his foreign snow-bound tower Steve Jackson had planned out a novel combat system which was to sit on a shelf for quite a while until **Mike Woodruff** from **Adventure International** came along.

'Lawrence Miller, one of our shop managers in Birmingham, knows Mike Woodruff and he phoned up once to say that they would like to do an adventure game, where I could write the adventure. So we talked about it a bit and the whole thing evolved. It started off that I would write a book and they would link it into a computer, using their graphics — similar to those used in *The Hulk*, which are pretty good.'

It sounded like a good idea, Adventure International would be freed of memory-wasting description and able to concentrate on strong graphics while Steve would be free to write in as atmospheric a style as he wanted. It also occurred to him, that he had an entirely unused combat system which had been sitting around for two years doing nothing.

'I thought this is all numbers so it would be perfect for a computer. Mike came round to my place and we went through a couple of combat routines and it worked well. Mike played it again and said, yes that's all right. So he put a programmer on it.

'The way it's working at the moment, there's this book with a story in it and there's this combat system on the computer so that when you come across the same monsters you'll learn about how to fight them, what best to do and what not to do, and you'll see a graphic on the screen. When you reach a certain point, say you open a door, it says on screen read such and such a reference in the book, so you turn to the book and you can read the character of the room and what's inside there.'

In effect this is a logical development of the *Fighting Fantasy* books, but it has a distinct advantage over them, as Steve points out.

'You see people cheat with these things — you know it says turn to page 79 and they do and they read it and say, oh no I don't fancy that at all, I'll go to page 71 instead! But with this system you can't cheat, because you don't know where you are or where you've got to go to, and if you step out of line then you're just hopelessly lost and the computer blows up!'

At the time of writing (just before Christmas) Mike Woodruff and his team are still putting the finishing touches to the first program in the series which is called *Isodene's Keep*. There have been delays in the schedule, but Steve seems unworried by this and is excited by the way things are going.

'It was supposed to be out for Christmas, but it's late which I think is quite a good sign because it means rather than just rush it out we're going to do it properly. Certainly on the role playing side I've never seen anything quite like it before. In *The Swordmaster* series there'll be different adventures and other features that we're trying to build in like you'll be able to play with more than one player, so that there can be three of four people with different characters, and when you have a combat different people can get involved.'

Mike Woodruff is also excited by the idea. I spoke to him some time after talking to Steve, when development on *Isodene's Keep* was more advanced. He told me, 'You don't see the combat system calculations on screen, that's all done automatically as are the updates after a combat. Up to six characters are controllable by the player, or by six players if desired. The monsters are all animated. We have taken our comic strip style graphics even further — the monsters have animated claws, eyes, noses and their tails thrash about.

'At the top left of the screen messages appear telling you which paragraph to look up in the book. There you'll see a description of the location, and on screen you'll be told what movable objects are there such as treasures or traps. The exciting thing is that each game will be different as monsters, treasures and traps are all relocated with every game.

'I think this is as close as you can get to Dungeons and Dragons with the computer and the book jointly acting as the Dungeon Master.'

So the package will be a book and a tape. The series won't have a common tape will it because the graphics will be modified each time to suit the storyline; and although the fighting system, which is a large chunk of the database, will remain much the same, both Steve and Mike say they are aware of the development possibilities of this very flexible system.

Steve says, 'I'm not a programmer so I don't know how much they're going to be able to get in of all this stuff. You can also carry your character on from one game to another, at least that's the plan.'

Isodene's Keep is due for release at the end of January, beginning of February and at the time of writing, Adventure International are hoping it will cost £9.95, but the final price will depend very much on the costs of printing the paperback book to go with it. The second in the *Swordmaster* series will be available a month later, titled *Guardians of the Frozen Tower*. Adventure International have a two year contract with Steve Jackson to produce a whole series of *Swordmaster* games, and it will be fascinating to see the development of the ideas outlined above as the series progresses.

'It was heartbreaking really, because we knew exactly what we wanted, a mixture of the situations in the books and something like the D&D Intelevision game. There were some nice features, I mean the way the little man ran about so quickly, that was just great, and I like it when he pulls his sword out, it looks quite disgusting! So now with computer games we are trying to make more like the adventure books because one of the comments we had on that experiment was, what's this got to do with *The Warlock of Firetop Mountain*? And what can we say, we had asked for it to be quite close but we hadn't got it and it was out. You see a lot of people were saying that they wanted adventure games, these are adventure game books, so why not do adventure computer games?'

FIGHTING STRENGTHS

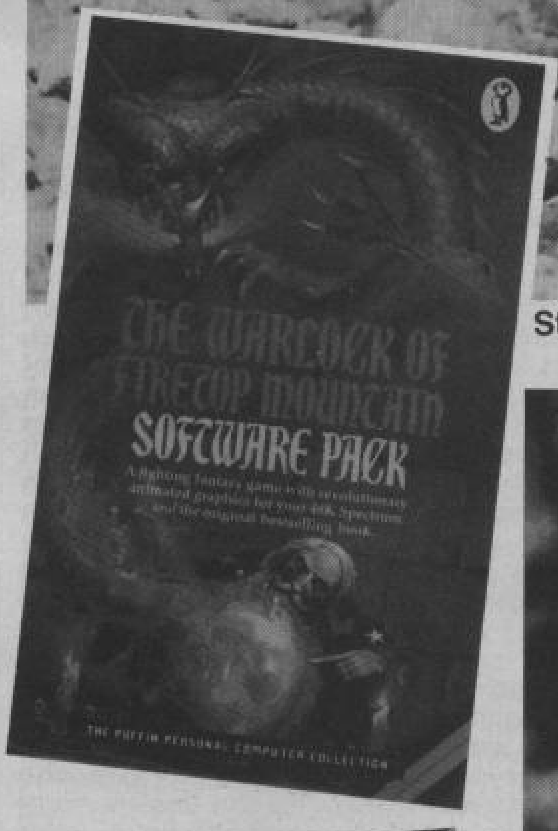
Games Workshop released three programs under its own imprint, the wargame *D-Day*, the role playing strategy of *Battlecars* and the Quilled adventure *Tower of Despair*. The two most recent releases are also from the *Fighting Fantasy* series of books, numbers 2 and 3, *Citadel of Chaos* and *Forest of Doom*, which are more or less straightforward computer adaptions of the books. But Steve has recently been pursuing his own ideas further in computer games.

'I've suddenly discovered what you can do with computer games on the adventure side. They can be so much more varied than in the books. You can keep so much hidden, although they'll never replace the literary side of a book, that you can describe so much in a book. It's horses for courses really – if you want to read and get involved in a story I'd much rather do that in a book than in a straight adventure game. But what you can do with computer is incredible. It probably all sounds a bit old hat! But ever since I started thinking about *The Swordmaster* thing and the *Sorcery* thing, I started thinking, oh well computers can do that, you can't do that in a book. So there's really lots of new ideas here.

'Ian and I remember in the early days a customer who came into our shop in Hammersmith had a copy of Adventure running on a civil service computer some-

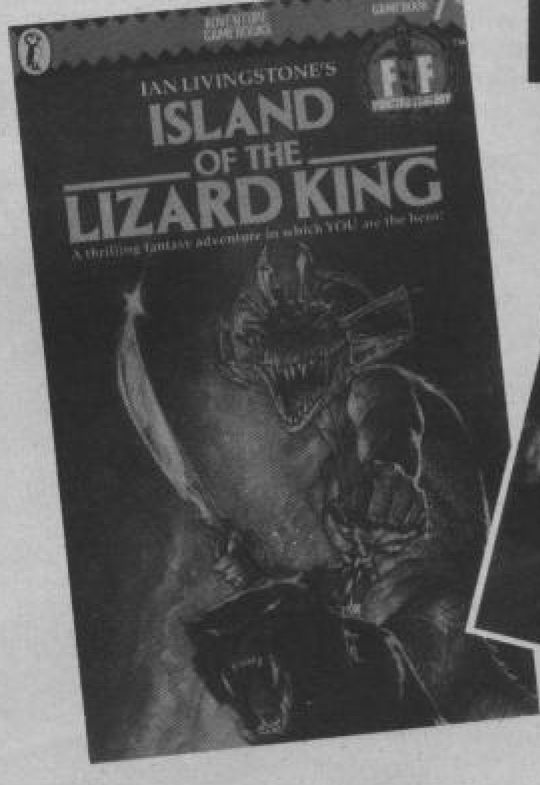


Steve & Ian













where! And he invited us down one Saturday morning to have a look at it. We had heard about adventure games going in the States, about this massive program, everybody had a different version of it and they were passing it around these big institutions. So we went down and played it, that was our first glimpse of adventure computer games. Well it was quite compulsive. But I find it rather frustrating, I must admit, that you've got to understand the 'language'. I mean this was adventure's big thing, wasn't it? You had to learn everything about the game, there was a language and you had to learn what it responded to, what it didn't. You started off being plonked in front of a screen and started typing away. And it's like, you know, monkeys on a computer. Eventually you come up with the words of Shakespeare.'

Computer adventures have come a long way since then, and Steve's main preoccupation at the moment is the development of *Sorcery* and *The Swordmaster* series for Adventure International. *Sorcery* has been developed from his quartet of books of the same name. I asked him where the idea had come from.

'I went on holiday in Nepal in 82, just after *Warlock* was published and it was just such a good place to go then – I mean my head was full of *Warlock* and working out these fighting fantasy books and suddenly I wound up in Nepal which was such an inspiring country for fantasy. Tolkien based *The Hobbit* and *Lord of The Rings* in Nepal. We went on this trek through the hills and came across these people who are just like Hobbits, you know, they're small and squat and have hairy feet and they always smile. You go trekking around these hills, there are no roads, everything is transported on their backs and you can just imagine monsters being around in the hills. That was where *Sorcery* came from. I thought, this has got to make a book.

'*Sorcery* the computer game is going to be sort of like the book, but not quite. It's got a lot of new things in it, it's not just got the text stuck onto the computer, because the thing about *Sorcery* is that it's a series of four books that go together taking you right across this kingdom here. What is different about *Sorcery*, apart from the fact that it is four linked books and you can carry the character you play over from one to the other, is the way the spells work. Originally there was a spell book with it, but they decided to include it *in* the book. Each of the 48 different spells is identified with a codeword which is related to the spell and you practice this, you do it on a bus, and then you start the adventure, and you can't look at the spell book once you've started the adventure, so when you get to a place when you can use a spell you've got to remember what HOB means, and if you can't remember what HOB means and you just choose it, then the chances are that things will go badly wrong.

'I was very disappointed with it at first, it's been going about a year and a half now, came out as a Penguin initially, now its under Puffin, but now, number three has got to third place in the children's book chart.

'Now *Sorcery* is ideal for a computer game and I realised this when I was struggling with the spells, because with the spells set out like that you can only give a choice of five at any time otherwise you'd fill the whole book up with references, but with a computer you can have a matrix which has got all the spells and all the monsters and it cross-indexes them all for you. It's so much easier to do it. So I wanted that to go in and also I wanted more graphics to go in that aren't in Forest of Doom, Citadel of Chaos. And there are lots of other things, I've just been working on an encounter system for non-playing characters. You come across different characters and it's not like in *Valhalla* where it just says, "Odin gives you the stick", you can have conversations with these characters, and they've got useful information for you. I don't know whether all this is possible yet. The people who are doing the programming haven't raised any objections, they say it's going to be expensive in terms of memory, and I say is it possible? and they say, oh of course it's possible!'

The company doing the actual programming for *Sorcery* is Scribos, two professional programmers who have done a lot of the Penguin study software. They have never done games before but Steve has been very pleased with their presentations so far.

'For example you see a little graphic in perspective of your man and you can make him wander around, and as you go off the edge of the screen he comes back in on the other side. Then there's a maze that joins it all up. And there are certain scenes from the book which you'll recognise, and as you're wandering around the non-playing characters come along and you can run away from them or stop them. It might be some time before this comes out under the Penguin label.'

In addition to *Sorcery*, Steve Jackson is also working an another revolutionary type of adventure game which mixes book and computer. We detail the background of *The Swordmaster* in the boxed section. And on top of that, Games Workshop is preparing for another round of releases. Work is well under way for a computer game of the *2000AD* comic hero, Judge Dredd and there are plans for a version of the cult movie *Roller Ball*. But Steve's primary concern is with the development of the fantasy side, and he neatly summed up our interview with these words:

'Well Workshop is expanding at an enormous rate, we've had a very good year, and we've got lots of plans for 85 about what we're going into, more shops is definitely on. We're doing more with miniature figures with our company Citadel Miniatures, and we're opening up new areas with using plastics for moulding instead of the more traditional metal. But something I'd like to see Games Workshop do is bring in a real role playing game on a computer, marry the two together. There are certain things we are expected to do, like we're not expected to bring out arcade games because we're not Waddingtons, adventure games yes, and wargames and that kind of thing, but it would be nice to get a proper computer role playing system going. Turning board games into computer games is an obvious thing. I mean things like *Battlecars* is a very popular board game and you can imagine that the idea is quite appealing to computer games players. We're not getting into the top three of the charts with our computer games sales but hopefully we are building up a base of people who think, oh that's a Games Workshop game, I'll get that. I'd feel very proud if that happened.'









DEREK BREWSTER'S

Adventure Trail

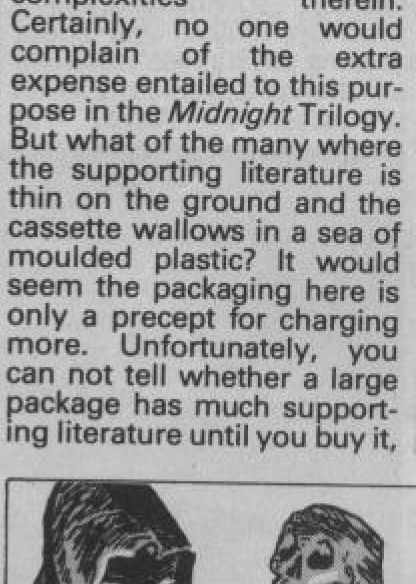
PUBLIC IMAGE

You know, when I buy a piece of software, or have it dropped through my letter-box, I expect the packaging and instruction leaflet to inform me on why this game exists and why it should merit my attention. Gilsoft's *The Curse* has a sparse cover which give more prominence to copyright and warning notices than to the substance of the program. One can only assume there is nothing worth mentioning and so what impression does this give? It hardly augurs well. Indeed, the cover supplies the name of the artist who decorated the inlay but there is no mention of the author of the program itself. Don't get me wrong about artwork, certainly packaging should have good artwork but this must reflect the quality of the program within, and not exceed it. The artistic details of *Tower of Despair* shows how artwork can add appreciably to the atmosphere and enjoyment of an adventure. But surely the software business has much in common with the music industry; the public will remain loyal to good programmers and seek out quality from whichever quarter it emanates just as loyalties to artists and the unearthing of excellence goes on even in the music world.

Packaging and leaflets provide the room for two important aspects, the storyline and instructions. A storyline musn't be so small as to fit in the window at the back of a cassette casing but should be full and enlightening enough to ensure a substantive background to develop in the player's mind before play begins and to encourage a feel for how the game might be tackled. Alas, I have witnessed so many storylines tagged on to a finished program to round off the marketing exercise. It should, of course, be in existence before coding begins so that the plot and theme are integral parts from the off, ensuring a sense of consistency and credibility pervades the whole. Instructions find a natural home on the cassette cover where browsing in a computer store may tell something of the game and should not reside in the program as this would then represent an unforgivable waste of memory (some Quilled games are guilty here) and neither should they reside on the tape before the game proper as this is then a waste of the game player's time (Knight's Quest, for example).

All this brings me round to a great and ever-fluctuating debate in software retailing, namely,' should the package be large and flamboyant or small and utilitarian. Cynically, a large package is justified by the greater price charged for it, representing a greater capture of the consumer's money for the software business merry-go-round — packaging, printing, publicity. This last is a significant point as a large package is its own advert. Who can forget *Valkyrie 17* in all the shops before Christmas? Perhaps there is a deeper message here, playing on the psychology which has it that if a company has gone to all the trouble of producing a large, expensive package, then what is on the tape must be worth something. Alas, I can think of many examples where this reasoning is misleading. What a large presentation can afford is a suitably glossy booklet giving in-depth playing instructions and a greater insight into the complexities therein. Certainly, no one would complain of the extra expense entailed to this purpose in the *Midnight* Trilogy. But what of the many where the supporting literature is thin on the ground and the cassette wallows in a sea of moulded plastic? It would seem the packaging here is only a precept for charging more. Unfortunately, you can not tell whether a large package has much supporting literature until you buy it, as shops are reluctant to leave anything on the shelves which might tempt petty thieving.

Well, here is the crux of the matter; I myself, on the whole, prefer cassette-sized packs because they are easier to carry back home and are more utilitarian in a futuristic way. It is similar to my regard for the Spectrum — there is some fascination in a computer with 48K RAM which takes up just a little more room than a pocket calculator and can be unplugged and carried around with the ease of a book. So with cassettes. A world of adventure packed into a small plastic box with neat, precise artwork, and playing instructions unfolding like a concertina. But if large packages grabbed the attention, and the shelf space, over the festive season one development had them cast as dinosaurs. Not only could you allot the big packs a position with the cassette-sized packs neatly stacked in cassette racks and cases, but, when browsing in shops their absence amongst the chart displays was very noticable — they just could not fit into displays like the Boots Top Twenty!



ADVENTURE TRAIL REVIEW RATINGS

ATMOSPHERE: reflects quality of location description and graphics and how credibly characters behave.

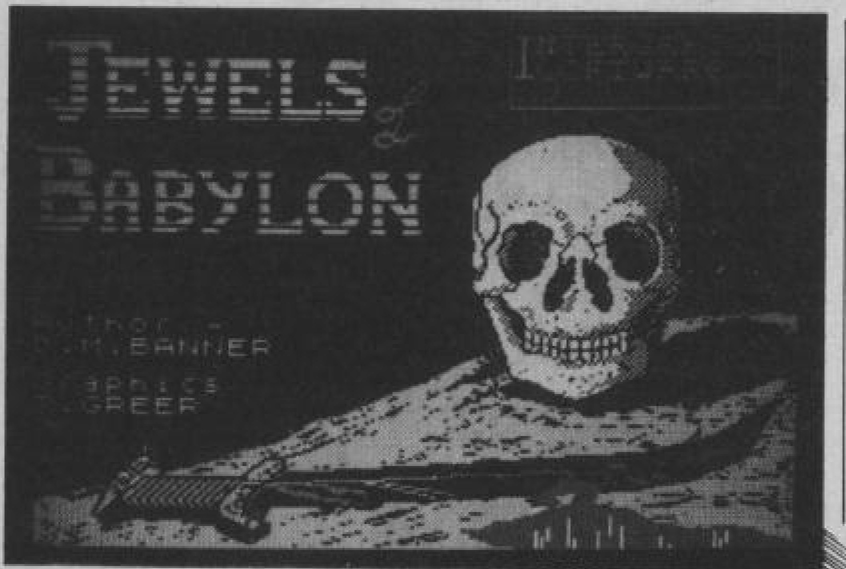
VOCABULARY: the completeness of the vocabulary and friendliness of response. All words and associated words (objects etc) in location descriptions should be included.

LOGIC: reflects the logic of the problems encountered and whether or not you are likely to be killed without warning or chance of escape.

DEBUGGING: indicates the level of crashproofing. A program should not be crashed simply by making an incorrect entry or by pressing an unfortunate combination of keys.

OVERALL: general rating based on price and the other ratings BUT NOT AN AVERAGE OF THE OTHER RATINGS.







JEWELS OF BABYLON

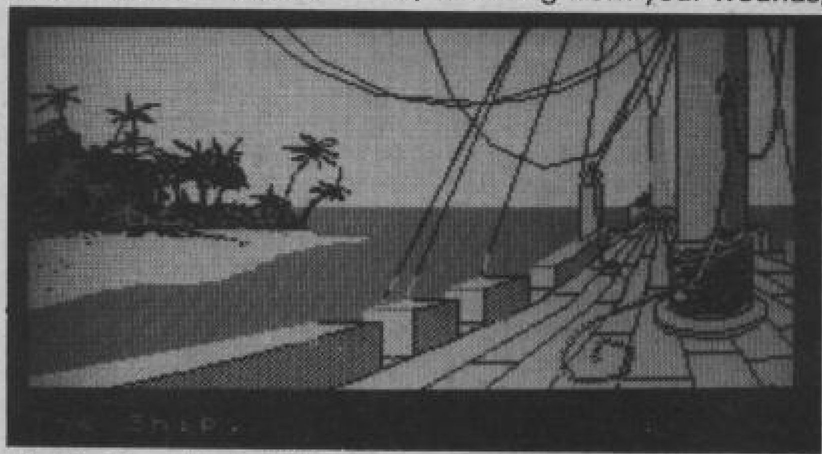
Producer: **Interceptor Software**
Memory required: **48K**
Retail price: **£5.50**
Language: **machine code**
Author: **D. Banner & T. Green**

Jewels of Babylon follows in the footsteps of *Message from Andromeda* and *Forest at World's End* and if you were to buy this latest offering there would be few surprises, for all intents and purposes this is the same program but with a pirate/desert island backdrop. In effect it's the same cake with a different flavoured icing. It's almost inconceivable that a programmer could continue to churn out the same old game without attempting any improvements to refine the product, but this is the case we have here. All the old criticisms concerning the first two games still hold strong.

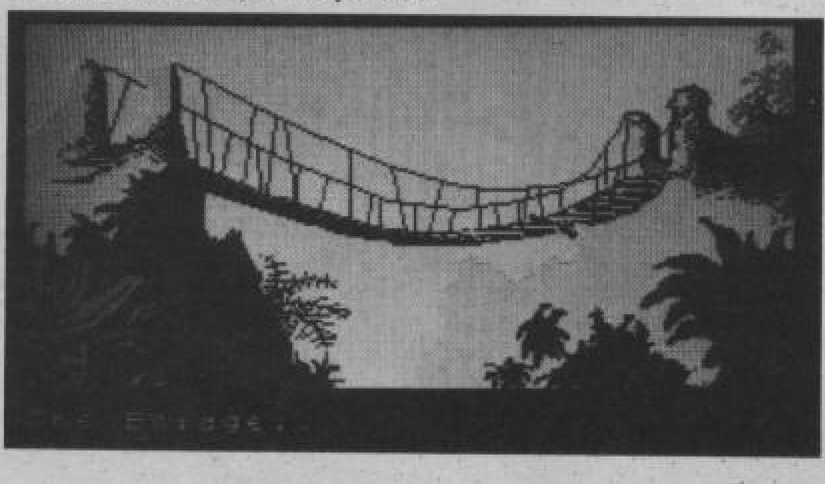
Impressive, high quality graphics appear very quickly and only appear automatically on your first visit to a location, which is a nice touch, but when you count up, there really aren't that many graphics. The input routine has opted for neatness as opposed to efficiency; there is no cursor and no beep on entry although to be fair input remains mostly error-free. Descriptions are short and unimaginative giving the whole a weak impact and there is no score. This game uses some awful system of text scrolling whereby the top part scrolls up and off when you input at the bottom.

The game boasts 100 locations. I went through 50 without solving a single problem, unless you count making the natives' supper a solution to a problem. Like its predecessor, *Forest at World's End*, it often falls back on cliche and is about as interesting as a jumblesale paperback book.

Three thousand years ago, before the Christian era, a fabulous treasure was created by master craftsmen in the old city of Babylon. Such was the beauty of this collection, many men died to obtain possession of it. At the end of the nineteenth century the jewels were in English hands. In a great gesture of friendship, Queen Victoria intended to give them as a wedding present to an Indian Princess. On route from West Africa the ship carrying the jewels was attacked by pirates who took them, leaving the crew for dead. You are the sole survivor of the attack. After recovering from your wounds, you vow to reclaim the jewels. After much marching you locate the pirates' base on a remote island. Your objective is to search the island, find the jewels and return them to the ship.



Excellent graphics in THE JEWELS OF BABYLON, but the program doesn't really live up to the pictures.



The vocabulary often goes beyond verb/noun but despite the instructions suggesting adjectives, adverbs and prepositions are needed to avoid ambiguity, there are many cases where this is demonstrably not so and all the extra input required does is to make the language that bit more unfriendly. Take, for example, your first task — to get into the boat from the ship to enable you to go ashore. CLIMB LADDER and ENTER BOAT are not accepted, but CLIMB DOWN LADDER and CLIMB INTO BOAT are. I admit there is a thin dividing line between greater sophistication and unfriendliness, but the program could provide more prompts to coax you along the right path. When you see a smooth, vertical slab of rock on your travels, you can't move or push it, but surely you should be able to examine it?

If, for you, an adventure is not complete unless it has a maze then here you can get all dizzy amongst no less than three. Amazing.

Jewels of Babylon shows all the traits of a game knocked off an assembly line. Some of its shortcomings are common to many while the conspicuous absence of any real problems is more typical of this series from Interceptor. If variety is the spice of life then this game is one big amorphous lump of monosodium glutamate.

COMMENTS

Difficulty: quite difficult
Graphics: very few but are fast and well designed
Presentation: has awful habit of scrolling description off as soon as new input is introduced. No use is made of colour
Input facility: often pedantic requiring more than verb/noun for no good reason
Response: instantaneous
General rating: could prove a challenge.

Atmosphere	6
Vocabulary	5
Logic	6
Debugging	10
Overall value	6



The Red Kipper Flies at Midnight

YOU GET HOME ONE EVENING to discover a message on your answering machine. Something you'd thought hidden for good has reared its ugly head once again. Valkyrie 17 is active.

Over the next five nights a series of frantic phone calls convince you that the matter deserves further investigation. You receive a dossier on the activities of Valkyrie 17. Pieced together from fragmentary reports culled from the last forty years you slowly begin to put the whole thing together. Drakenfeur, Heinrich and Reichsmuller. The badge pressed into your hand on the station at__________. And that last desperate call for help from the Glitz Hotel overlooking Lake Bruntz.

Your cover is good. Very good in fact. You spend a few days sniffing around and then head up towards Lake Bruntz. You check in to the Glitz Hotel. It's the last lead you have. You seem to be getting nowhere.

Then on your way to the bar you sense a movement in the shadows. You feel a blow on your temple. And everything goes black...

Valkyrie 17 is an Adventure featuring both graphic and text locations. You will meet several different characters some of whom may help you while others see your demise as their sole purpose in life.

Included in the pack is a comprehensive dossier on Valkyrie 17. On the reverse of the cassette tape are the answerphone messages. And then of course there's the game itself.

LOADING TIME	**5½ minutes.**	**MICRODRIVE**	**X/FER FUNCTION**
LOCATIONS	**100+**	**FUN FACTOR 8**	
LEVEL	**?**		
SOUND	**Beep Beep**		

HINTS

Watch your back, try not to get killed and mind your language.

The RamJam Corporation cannot accept responsibility for injury either mental or physical caused during the playing of Valkyrie 17. Furthermore the existence of these words affects your statutory rights.

VALKYRIE 17

Valkyrie 17 is distributed by Palace Virgin Gold, 69 Flempton Road, London E10 7NL. Telephone: 01-539 5566. Available from all leading wholesalers.



DOOMDARK'S REVENGE



Producer: **Beyond**
Memory required: **48K**
Retail price: **£9.95**
Language: **machine code**
Author: **Mike Singleton**

Doomdark's Revenge is the second game in the Midnight Trilogy. The first part, *Lords of Midnight*, was widely acclaimed as one of the best and most original games to be seen on a Spectrum. *Doomdark's Revenge* is a very similar style game with few major surprises although, if anything, the sophistication has increased, boasting 6000 map locations and a staggering 48000 panoramic views. One of the strongest points of these superb strategy games are their ability to accommodate two or more players since a set of characters can be shared out to ensure active participation for all.

The game is set in the Land of Icemark to the north of the Land of Midnight. The Icemark Chronicles consist of five chapters in the glossy booklet similar to the one which accompanied the first episode of the epic.

The burden of the Witchking's cold dominion had lifted from the Lands of Midnight like a sudden waking from a nightmare as Luxor's army made its way from the gates of Ushgarak to the Citadel of Dreams, a stronghold of the Fey. Tarithel, the beautiful daughter of the Lord of Dreams and lady of the Forest since her mother relinquished the title on Solstice Eve, excused herself from the celebrations finding a strange longing to visit a secret glade deep within the forest. Here she sees a boy riding oblivious through the trees and she makes use of her special powers to call the boy's stallion back. Several Mills & Boon stanzas later, Morkin, the young man riding through the forest, and Tarithel are to be wed so that the Fey and the Free can be as one under the protection of the House of the Moon. On the eve of the wedding Morkin travels back at the dead of night to the spot where they first met. Here a great storm brews and crashes lightning about his head causing his stallion to rear, throwing him unconscious to the ground. He has a dream of a voluptuous temptress lying on a silken bed. When he awakes from his disturbed slumber he sets off at once for the source of his vision – Kahangrorn in the far north of the Frozen Empire, home of Shareth the Heartstealer, Empress of Icemark and dread ruler of the Frozen Empire.

Seeing the storms gathering in the north, the Fey Lord of Imorthorn sent his swiftest bird, a white falcon, with a warning for their fellow Fey to the south in Midnight. The Lord of Dreams reads out the message:

'My Lord Moonprince, this message hails from lands far beyond our ken, from the cold Icemark which has been severed from Midnight for a thousand moons and more. . . . It warns of a great storm flying from the North towards Midnight and of the evil designs of one he calls the Heartstealer upon our fair land.'

Three days later Tarithel disappears taking with her one of her father's swiftest mounts. The gathering at the Citadel of Dreams disperses, moving southwards to home and kin. Only Luxor remains with one thousand of his Houseguard, waiting for news. It eventually comes from Rorthron the Wise, riding out of the North bearing ill-tidings. Rorthron had heard Shareth's voice from across the wild, 'Tell this to your precious Moonprince: I have his son in my grasp already. The boy is mad with love for me and lies at this moment in one of my less pleasant dungeons.' (It gives some idea of how long this game might prove when she adds, '7 moons from now I . . . will ride forth to avenge Doomdark, my beloved father!'

It was decided that the



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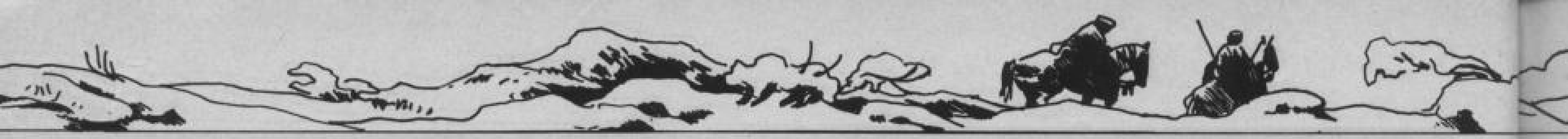
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Lord of Dreams would remain in Midnight to marshal the Fey and the Free while Rorthron would ride north with the Moonprince to the Frozen Gates, black cavernous tunnels that lead to secret ways beneath the ice. Rorthron with Words of Power and a roaring flame issuing from his staff led the way to the Gate of Varenorn.

Meanwhile, far to the north Tarithel had lost Morkin's trail and was now following rumours to the City of Imorthorn in search of news.

What you have just been reading is a precis of the Icemark Chronicles and in it you will find many of the facts necessary to succeed in the game.

At the beginning of play you have three characters under your control, Luxor the Moonprince, Rorthron the Wise and Tarithel the Fey which have their own keys marked on the keyboard overlay (Morkin's key is not used until later in the game). Characters rallied to your banner can be chosen by way of the SELECT key. How long this list might become is reflected in the need for a MORE key which is similar to Scroll? in BASIC; 123 lords help command the five races of Giant, Dwarf, Fey, Icelords and Barbarians. Recruiting a character to your cause is not as easy as with *Lords of Midnight*. On one occasion when confronted with three lords who owed allegiance to Lorangrim the only options offered were Rest or Attack; no Recruit option was proffered. Rather odd, but no doubt, indication of some greater twists in plot than were evident in *Lords of Midnight*. Even when accomplished recruitment can lead to some unforseen problems, eg. Tarithel recruited a Lord of the Fey and was then killed by him.

There are four commands to control a character, LOOK, MOVE, CHOOSE and CHECK.

LOOK: eight compass direction views of the landscape corresponding to what the character sees in the direction he is looking. You cannot move at night, nor into the Icy Wastes that surround Icemark, or when exhausted or frightened. CHOOSE: the options put up on the screen will depend on the situation the character is in but will also reflect the particular personality of the character. CHECK: there are four check keys, Check Place, Check Battle, Check Army (details of your own army, any other army in the same location and any army immediately ahead of your character) and Check Person (some personalities may change as the game progresses).

The game begins on the day that the Moonprince rides forth from the Gate of Varenorn into Icemark. During the day, which begins with a rosy dawn giving the screen a deep red colour, you move the characters under your control where the distance a character can move depends on the difficulty of the terrain, his vigour and whether he is riding or walking. Nightfall signals the beginning of movement for the forces of the Heartstealer, plus independent characters. Where this game proves more difficult than its predecessor is in deciding which of these independent characters may be friendly and how to go about recruiting them once you decide they are friendly. An army can either approach or attack an opposing force but the approach option should be used with some caution for if the approach is not fruitful and battle results you will be at a disadvantage. There is only one army in the whole of Icemark who will never rally to Luxor's banner – Shareth's forces, who are his mortal enemy.

You, of course, play the role of Luxor the Moonprince. By virtue of the Moonring, which lends you the Power of Vision and the Power of Command, you control those characters in the Land of Icemark who are friendly to your cause, looking through their eyes at the surrounding landscape and guiding them in their many tasks. The Moonprince's victory can result from many different actions, representing a lesser of greater victory, but before any celebrations Luxor must return safely to the Gate of Varenorn. The most basic victory • is the rescue of Morkin where the main hope of success lies with Tarithel. In any event, the safe return of both Tarithel and Rorthron is important while the successful retrieval of the Crowns of Icemark and the arcane objects brings greater victories. If Morkin should be slain only one victory remains possible for Luxor Shareth's complete destruction. But this is no easy task as the grief caused by Morkin's death will greatly sap Luxor's strength. The greatest victory of all is the destruction of Shareth and the safe return of Luxor, Morkin, Tarithel and Rorthron to Varenorn, something you will discover is not easy at all. Glowing letters will flame on the surface of the Moonring revealing to Luxor the ancient Watchwords of Midnight which will protect Midnight for as long as he lives.

The computer plays the part of Shareth the Heartstealer and controls the characters and armies under her sway. Independent characters may be persuaded to join her cause and hence quicken a victory for the Empress achieved through the death of the Moonprince.

You are only given a very rough schematic map of the Land of Icemark when compared to that given with *Lords of Midnight*. There are five main realms marked on it. In the north-east is Shareth's Frozen Empire marked by a picture of an icy beauty in the place or more detailed cartography. To the west is the Kingdom of the Giants, in the south-west the Barbarian Outlands, in the east the ancient temples of the Dwarves and in the south-east the forest-dwelling Fey. You quickly leave behind the Frozen Wastes, mile after mile of treacherous ice, sheer drops and inhospitable peaks. As you make your way north, mists sent down from Kahangrorn obscure features of the landscape and hide likely dangers. The super graphic tokens of *Lords of Midnight* are expanded to include mountains, cities, forests, towers, pits, halls, huts, hills, fortresses, palaces, temples, gates, stones, fountains, icy wastes, mists and armies.

Doomdark's Revenge is assured a huge following and deservedly so. It has improved on its predecessor in all the right ways, with a more difficult set of tasks and a more sophisticated plot. Enemy and foe are not pictured as such and it is up to you to decide to what extent the widely varying forces can be cajoled to your banner. Of the individual leaders of the five races, each has his own lieges, hatreds and personality – reckless or cowardly, greedy or worthy, brave or treacherous. The quirks in both character and plot assures a lively debate on the Land of Icemark for some time to come.



COMMENTS

Difficulty: varies depending on quest, more difficult than *Lords of Midnight*
Graphics: excellent
Presentation: very good
Input facility: menu driven
General rating: excellent, a classic

Atmosphere	10
Vocabulary	N/A
Logic	10
Debugging	10
Overall value	**10**



THE CITY OF DEATH

Producer: **Redshift**
Memory required: **48K**
Retail price: £
Authors: **P. Carmpouloni & G. Carmpouloni**

City of Death is an adventure game which takes place in an old city inhabited by some very unusual people. Strangers are avoided by the populace, and hunted down, jailed or killed by mercenary guards of the city. Far more dangerous still are the soul-looters, who in their bright red garb roam the streets, terrorising the inhabitants.

You start the game on the jetty of a harbour where your ship has docked. All you know about the city has been gleaned from whispered rumours. Your objective is to find the wizard Bellatrix. You will need whatever money you can get hold of, as information does not come cheap. Entering houses, you can steal, request news from the inhabitants, fight, surrender, or buy weapons, food and spells.

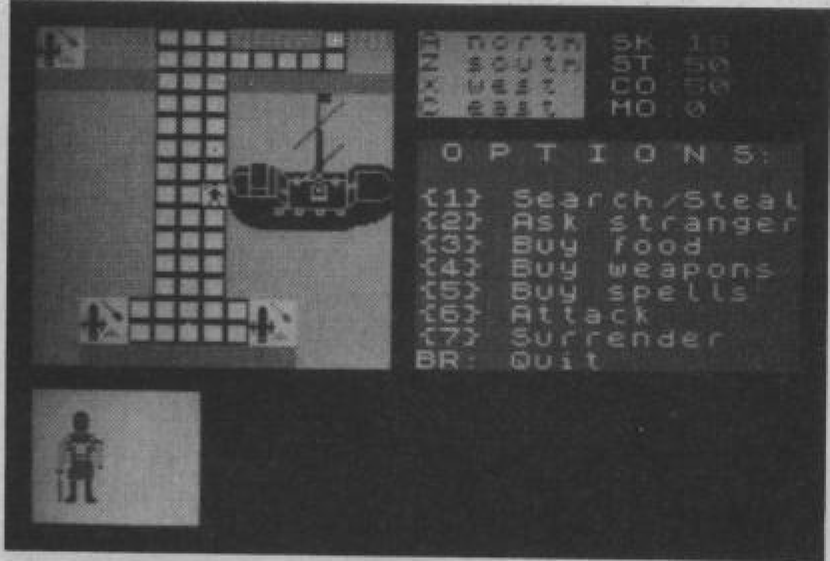
Many of the guards that you meet will have superior combat skills to yourself and you will therefore need to continually improve your combat skills when ever possible. This can be achieved by purchasing superior weapons from the armoury or magical abilities at the wizard's villa. Stamina can be increased by the purchase of food at one of the taverns in the city. The purchase of magical abilities also buys an increase of stamina.

Play entails using a strange combination of keys to move around; north is A, south is Z, west is X and east C. On your way around the paths that criss-cross the city your main preoccupations are the contents of the houses and taverns you pass. When confronted by a guard you will be asked if you wish to surrender. Should you be running short of stamina points, or if you feel that you are unlikely to win, it may be wise to surrender. When you enter into combat, attack options are displayed in order of difficulty of hitting that location (head, chest, body, legs, arms) and the damage inflicted by a successful hit. So a head blow is more tricky but scores greater damage if successful. However, you can choose to aim blind which gives you a better chance of a hit, but the computer randomly selects the location of inflicted damage. The severity of a wound inflicted on you is displayed in 'damage points'.

When entering a house you are given the option of either searching the house with a view to stealing anything of value, or asking







the inhabitants the direction of Bellatrix's house. However, in the city where greed plays an overwhelming part, you will find that you need to bribe them for an answer. False clues can be given, but a false clue will never be given twice, whilst genuine clues can appear again and again. Displayed in the top right-hand corner is your current status. This shows your current skill level, stamina, wealth, and how many moves you have made so far.

Clearly, *City of Death* is a D&D style game where the idea is to build up your stamina and skills to enable you to defeat ever more powerful foes in order to complete the quest. The success of such a game relies on the accurate interpretations of actions so that their outcome can be realistically expressed in terms of numbers. So, when you glance up to the top right the increments and decrements in stamina and skills should fall in line with what you would expect from the action taking place. In this game their are one or two inconsistencies that are left unexplained. Buying four units of food for five coins gains forty units of stamina while on another occasion one unit for twenty coins gave only twenty-five increments in stamina. Further, I think it strange that continually eating results in an increase in stamina without a reasonable limit to its growth.

Once you have visited a house, a return trip gives 'you have been here before' which although unhelpful in itself does allow you to get your bearings. It might have been a sneaky plus for the game had it allowed you to return to a location where you had paid for information but this time kill the occupant and regain your money. If you choose the option 'ask stranger' at a house, and there is no-one inside, you are not allowed to search and steal. Why not is not abundantly clear apart from the saving in program complexity. Combat, once again, continues to the death with no option for surrender or run while you have no idea of the strength of your opponent until combat begins. Another example of where the program leaves you in the cold is when paying money for arms, your skill factor increases, but you are not told of the type of arms you have succeeded in purchasing. In other words, it's all numbers and no realism. Asking for information from the natives you soon discover the limitations here since to choose information valued at five coins always gives 'a skeleton rules in the city'. In all fairness the game has got some charm in places. Three options are offered on loading, easy, moderate and difficult while during each game the guards move from a snail's pace posing very little threat to a remarkable agility towards the end.

City of Death is a neat, well-presented D&D style game with colourful graphics and a curious choice of movement keys. The jerky graphics and slow response are perhaps an indication of the game's posturing toward strategy rather than arcade but as a strategy game it has many inconsistencies and omissions. The game is not such a bad attempt at bringing D&D to the computer screen, it just has too many occasions where you're left thinking 'if only it had. . . .'

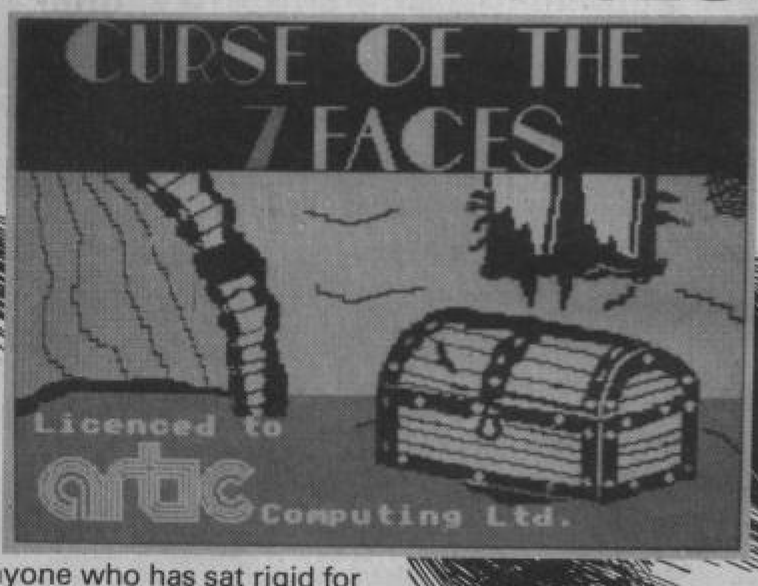
COMMENTS

Difficulty: easy at start but gets harder
Graphics: reasonable
Presentation: would be better if only listed options available at any one given time
Response: sluggish when moving large distances
General rating: missed opportunities but a good effort

Atmosphere	5
Vocabulary	N/A
Logic	5
Debugging	8
Overall value	5

CURSE OF THE SEVEN FACES

Producer: **Artic Computing**
Memory required: **48K**
Language: **machine code**
Author: **Alan McDonald**



I review here a pre-production version (4.0) of *Curse of the Seven Faces* to be marketed by Artic Computing. If all companies supplied such authoritative maps of their adventures they might receive more sympathetic reviews. It isn't just the detailed map that has coloured my view of this game; the screen provides quite a dash of colour itself using some of the more pleasing Spectrum shades to show off a text adventure to its best. This along with the attractive colours gives the program the edge in presentation.

Alas, all is not well though. This is a good game in need of a script writer. As it stands the plot is so weak and thin, vacuous and inconsistent, it could only be used in a second-rate American movie — you know — the type that comes round every school holiday and makes a fortune to the utter bewilderment of anyone who has sat rigid for what seems like hours in front of adverts for choc-ices, and films about pampered poodles who, when tired of strutting and fouling Sunset Boulevard, quite like to windsurf along Venice Beach. Anyway, it is a shame this this game hasn't got a credible storyline because otherwise it has many strong points including copious and atmospheric descriptions in what is a very long adventure oiled by a friendly vocabulary.

This paragraph is only for those who don't feel queasy when they watch M*A*S*H on television or who feel that long spells of adventuring should be punctuated with contrasting spells of hard-headed reality. Mazes are old hat and this game has two of the wretched things. The EXAMINE command isn't error-checked so EXAM XXX gives the same response as EXAM WALL, and EXAM SHELF gives the wrong response. In a large, dense, deciduous forest you see a garden spade but when you



go to pick it up it confusingly becomes a small silver spade. But more to the point, what is it doing in a hole in a tree in the first place? In another location you chance upon some dead adventurers, and searching their bodies turns up absolutely nothing while elsewhere objects are strewn around in the most unlikely places like confetti! If adventures can be compared to novels (and surely text adventures must be) then this adventure clearly falls short of the mark, unless it's a surrealist work. The structure of the plot is a trifle dull also. Nine times out of ten if you find something you'll find out what to do with it in the very next frame. Hence, I'm not giving too much away when I tell you that you'll need the stones in the armoury. Even supplied with this clue you might find the eventual solution to the problem here rather implausible. The adventure has no classic problems but instead relies too much on magic, and why does the wizard's own spell book give details on how to kill the wizard?

So much for what is amiss. What about saving grace?

The descriptions are really quite impressive. Here is an average paragraph: 'You are at the edge of a large, dense, deciduous forest. As you walk between the trees, the old leaves of last autumn crunch loudly under foot, whilst above you the new buds of spring are blossoming. A small pathway continues to the south-east, whilst to the north a hill slopes down into the peaceful valley.'

All eight compass directions are used with NE, SW etc. and the basic competence of the programming is high; the input routine is so sure-footed with a strong beep, and the action is so fast, that you get a tangible sense of pleasure just zipping around at high speed. The magic has you flying around even faster from here, there and everywhere like a demented pantomime fairy.

Curse of the Seven Faces is a structurally sound piece of programming but in these days when software is marketed with the sort of coherence and panache shown by the likes of the *Midnight* Trilogy, is it really enough just to plonk the adventurer into a labyrinth of anonymous wizards, trolls and dragons with a strange admixture of fantasy artefacts such as a staff, hat and cloak alongside futuristic poles inserted into locks, refined petrol and security discs more at home on a spaceship? Since, otherwise, the game is sound with many worthy features, it is to the extent you find such inconsistencies tolerable which will dictate your opinion of this game. To my mind it's a bit like organic farming with DDT or becoming self-sufficient in video cassette production.

COMMENTS

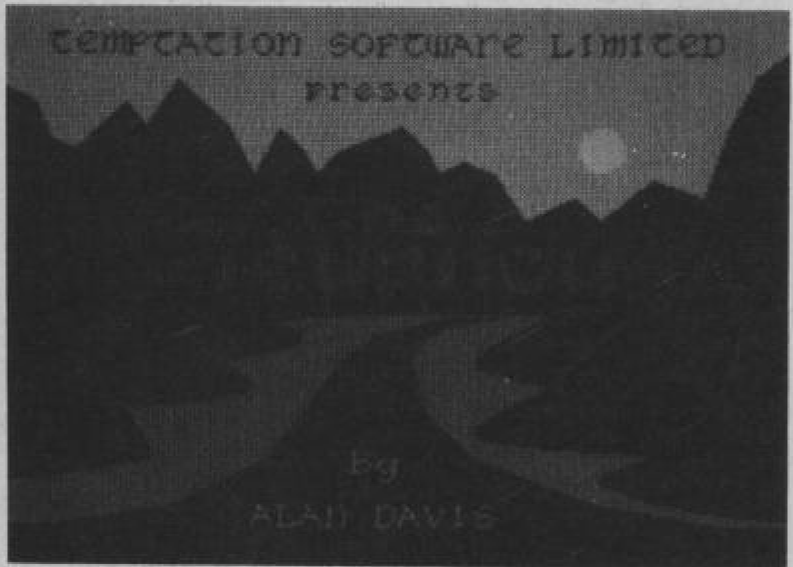
Difficulty: quite easy
Graphics: none
Presentation: very good
Input facility: goes beyond verb/noun in places
Response: instantaneous
General rating: good value

Atmosphere	9
Vocabulary	8
Logic	6
Debugging	10
Overall value	7





THE JOURNEY







Producer: **Temptation Software**
Memory required: **48K**
Retail price:
Language: **BASIC and machine code**
Author: **Alan Davis**

The Journey is a real-time text adventure with only a few graphics in which your quest is to seek out the legendary White Ship of the Elves and obtain passage to a distant land where your destiny as an adventurer may be fulfilled (don't ask me what this last bit means, I got it straight off the inlay). As you make your way over the lands of the Black Warlock, and beyond, you will meet many creatures. These, apart from the guardians who keep a constant watch over important routes and treasures, lead lives of their own and are free to roam as they wish. They may appear friendly, indifferent or decidedly hostile, and this will depend on how you conduct yourself. Some may have powers you don't possess but will only help once you've won their respect. Similarly, they will only talk to you, perhaps imparting useful information, if they like you.

After about twenty seconds the 'What Now?' prompt is withdrawn briefly from the bottom of the screen while the other characters are given the option of performing some function. To take a breather from the relentless onslaught of real-time, type in any letter in response to the prompt and do not enter. However, if this letter is subsequently inappropriate and you must delete it, the obsessive real-time element leaps straight back in slowing up your next input. So although *The Journey* is indeed a real-time game, this element is more obtrusive than in, say, *The Hobbit*, as WAIT, for example, does not speed up time but is simply there as an option to sit out the next twenty seconds, quite literally. This is not such a bad thing as the game has quite a strategy aspect to it and this provides time to think. Where the real-time really does intrude is when the computer insists on taking its turn every twenty seconds no matter what. You can be typing in a command only to find the program isn't accepting it since it is too busy with its own, rather slow and laborious, computations. When you finally get your input in, a delay of four seconds is almost standard.

For the seasoned adventurer the vocabulary shows many anomalies, so reading the inflated instructions, alas, is a necessity. Communicating with the characters is non-standard but easy to come to terms with. 'Say to' is dropped in favour of TELL ELF OPEN DOOR, or TELL ELF TAKE SWORD, which neatly keeps input to a four word maximum. If you should decide to get the dagger from the elf, and if TELL ELF DROP DAGGER is successful you are told that the elf has given you the dagger, yet you must still GET DAGGER.

When verb/noun couplings are used, the verb, sadly, must be typed out in full, so the almost universally friendly EXAM is expanded to EXAMINE. If a character in a nearby location is needed you can CALL him to you but the calls will go unheeded unless you have taken the time to befriend him in the first place. Friendly characters, once called, will prove more useful if you make use of the LIST command where LIST ELF will produce a rundown on what the elf is carrying. I like the command LIST ELF but why LIST instead of INVENTORY when you want to know what *you* are carrying? There is no sane reason why the letter **I** should not give your own inventory in every adventure — just like any other industry standard.

Each character in *The Journey*, including your own, possesses three attributes: intelligence, strength and experience. The command STATUS will give your own current attributes. You can determine the status of other characters by typing STATUS ELF etc. Your attributes will change as the adventure progresses. Solving certain problems may cause your intelligence to increase while eating increases your strength to a maximum which, quite rightly, does not just decrease with time but with combat and exertion. Interestingly, wounds are healed by eating in that you become strong once more. Your effectiveness in combat is governed primarily by the sum total of your attributes compared to those of your opponent, together with a small luck factor. You may engage a character in combat by typing FIGHT THE WARLOCK in which case it will be assumed you wish to fight with your bare hands. Possession of weapons may be used to advantage by typing FIGHT WARLOCK WITH SWORD. All weapons give you an increased advantage but you must guess which weapons are the more powerful. You need not specify a weapon when asking others to fight on your behalf (TELL ELF FIGHT GIANT). If the elf is carrying a weapon he will automatically use it and if he is carrying more than one, he will choose the most powerful. Others may take the initiative and attack you first and if wounded your strength is reduced.

The Journey is an adventure where selecting the most fruitful avenues and taking them at the appropriate times is more important than the linear progression characteristic of many adventures with a long line of problems. After studying the solution two thoughts cross my mind. Firstly, the game is very complicated and has the wherewithall to keep an avid adventurer engrossed for some time. Secondly, unravelling could prove rather difficult if the adventurer must discover for himself which weapons are the most lethal and which characters' friendships offer the most gains. Much work has gone into creating an impressive depth in the game which is very different from the run-of-the-mill adventures and offers a further advance in character interaction. Well worth a look at.

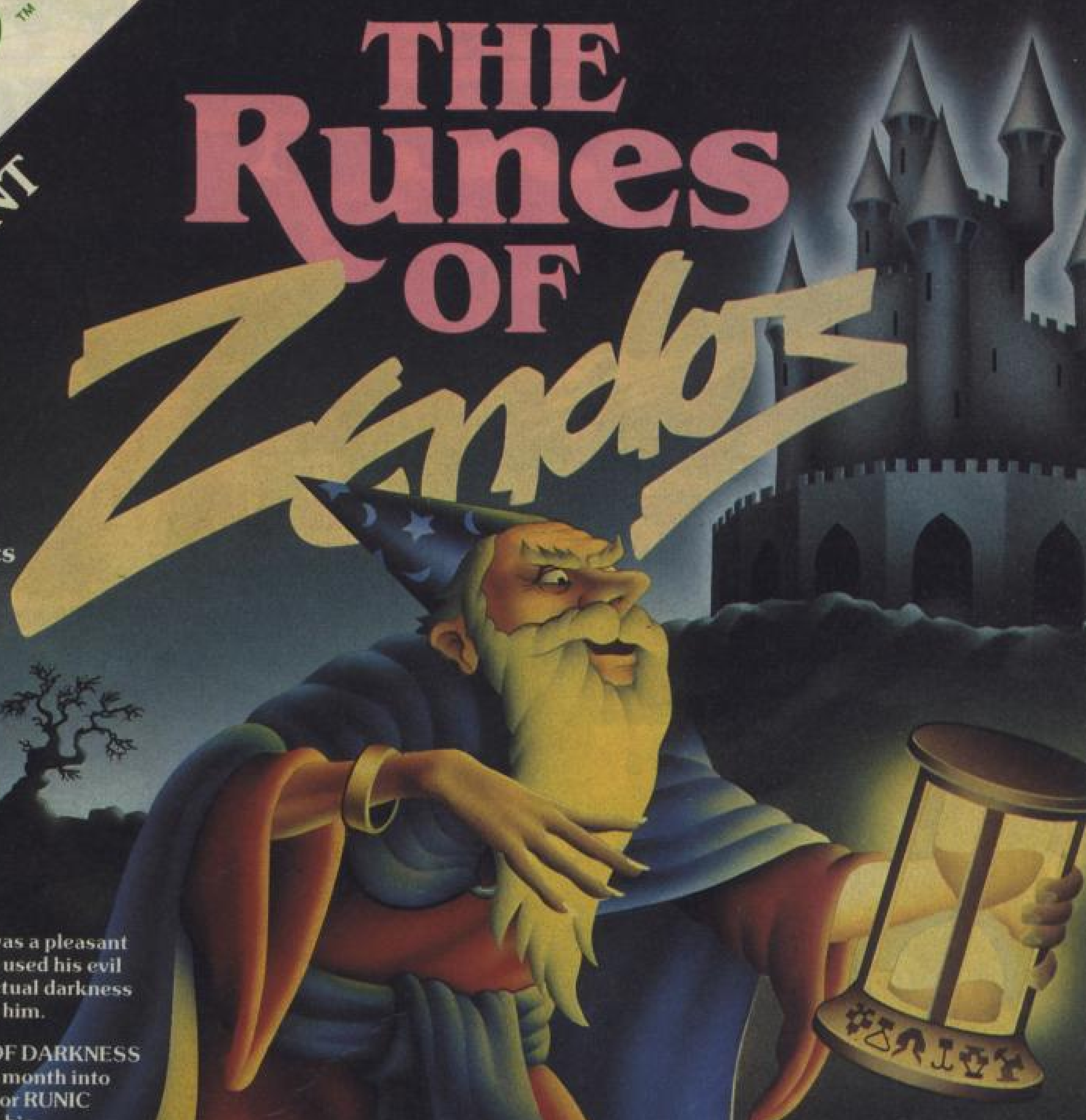
COMMENTS

Difficulty: moderate-difficult
Graphics: very few
Presentation: black on white with no use of colour
Input facility: verb/noun except when using TELL
Response: average about 4 seconds
General rating: different and worth a look at

Atmosphere	8
Vocabulary	6
Logic	7
Debugging	10
Overall value	8

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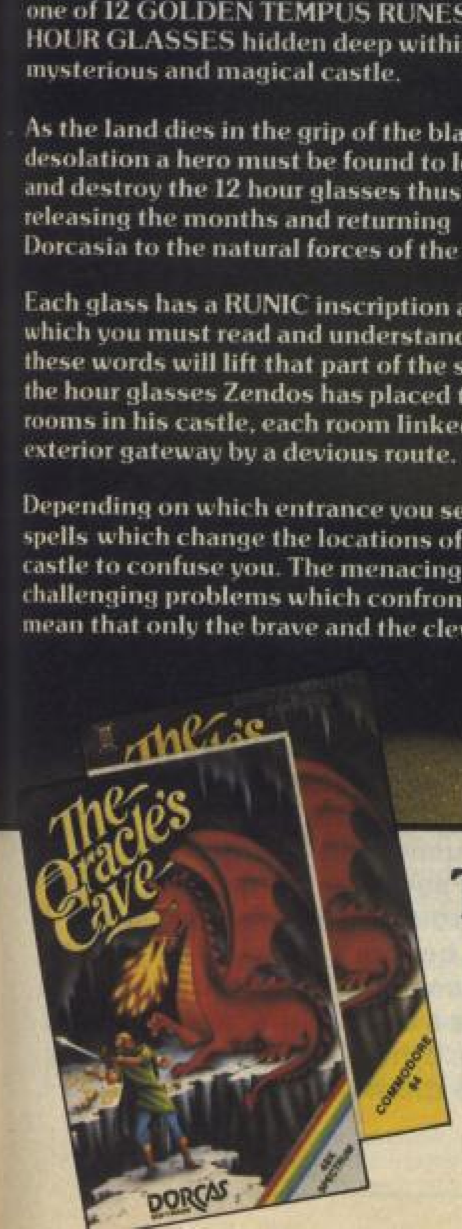
As the land dies in the grip of the black desolation a hero must be found to locate and destroy the 12 hour glasses thus releasing the months and returning Dorcasia to the natural forces of the seasons.

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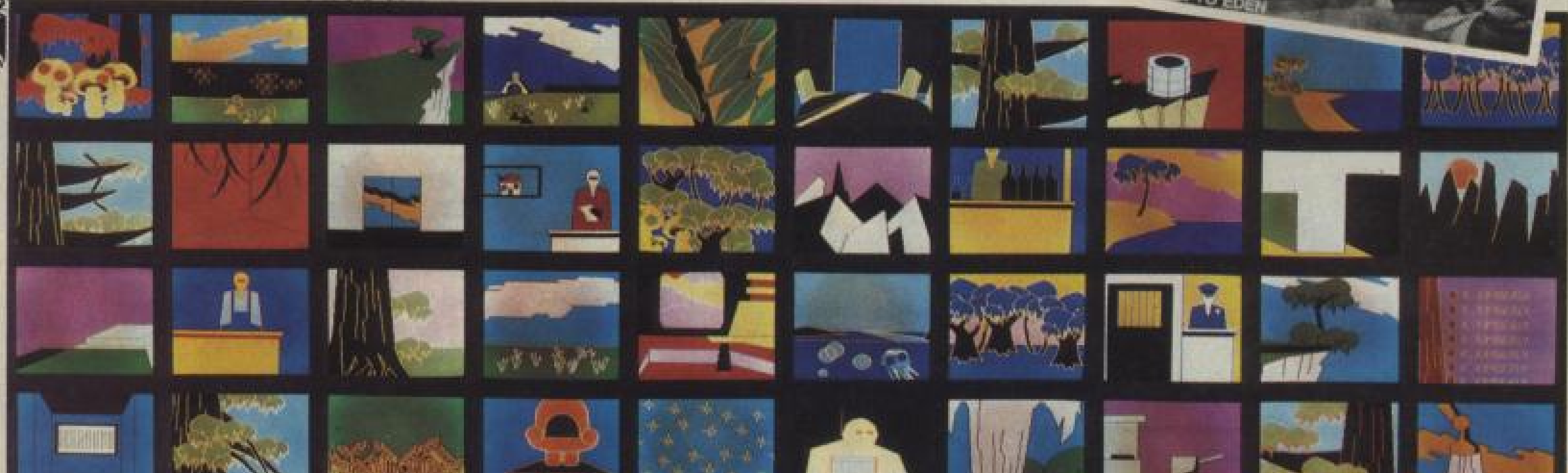
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RETURN TO EDEN



Here's an interesting item; it shows how far a company that is well known for its text-only adventures can go when it gets the graphics bug! These screen shots are from Level 9 Computing's recent release *Return to Eden*, their first ever graphical text adventure and the follow up to *Snowball*. Seen here are 100 of the 240 screens. The pictures are un-retouched screen-shots taken from a Sanyo monitor, using the Commodore 64 version of the game, although the graphics on other versions are similar. Level 9 says *Return to Eden* is a tricky game so it's likely that few people will have managed to get all the way through – most will still be stuck in the prairie or the forest near the start. But as you can see, there's lots more beyond! As it is their first graphics venture, Level 9 are naturally rather proud of their graphics and understandably upset that many players may miss some! So they sent us this collaged photograph to print as well as a copy of the poster (the box and inlay artwork was unfinished when Derek reviewed *Return to Eden*). For the other 140 screens, you'll just have to get a move on, explore, examine and whatever else is required and see them for yourselves!


THE 3D ADVENTURE MOVIE
AVALON



Looking through the Signpost mailbag this month, it again appears that most adventurers prefer text-only adventures to their illustrated bretheren. So come on you graphic fans, write in and admit you prediliction; surely nine out ten software houses can't be wrong?

A couple of months ago I asked you to write in about the type of adventure setting you prefer, either fantasy, science fiction, contemporary etc. The response has been about 50/50 for and against the fantasy setting. Neil Talbot **from Bromsgrove, Worcs writes**:

I get very easily bored fighting off silly monsters with unpleasant habits and discovering useless objects and rescuing vacant-minded princesses. I would rather find ways of escape, such as in *Urban Upstart* or *Colditz*, or even try to avert disaster as in Level 9's *Snowball*, or try to discover the identity of an amnesiac.

In contrast, Mike Arnautov **of Flackwell Heath writes**:

I distinctly prefer fantasy setting adventures. I freely acknowledge that this is simply a matter of personal taste, but adventures like *Urban Upstart* and such like bore me to death. Detective ones also leave me cold. It is unfortunate that the fantasy backdrop has been given a bad name by too many amateurish imitations of the one and only original adventure.

For those of you who are writing your own adventure games Michael Trinden **of Ascot gives the following advice for increasing speed**:

Eliminate all FOR-NEXT loops and use IF-THEN statements instead. Also, try to use as few arrays as possible and definitely no string arrays.

Oh, by the way Michael, you shouldn't have stuck your 10p donation to Lloyd Mangram's salary to your letter with such potent adhesive tape. In his euphoric frenzy to procure the lucre he shredded your letter. Now with such finance we're all likely to suffer the Wrath of Mangram. Only the other month he was implicated in subversive activity, publishing a letter claiming that the Adventure Trail tip on the whereabouts of Drapnir was wrong. This was of course, totally untrue and was purely an attempt at undermining confidence after his moves to steal Signpost, initiated in the October issue, had been thwarted.

One of the topics which interests me most is hearing how you think adventures should be designed and structured. Although everyone agrees that games should have a friendly vocabulary, logical plot and problems, and an easy to read lay-out, it always amazes me how many programs are released with fundamental defects. Mike Arnoutov **writes a very long letter on this subject which I think is worth publishing in full as it's very interesting and brings out many new points. Also, hopefully, some adventure authors and publishers may read this and possibly stop releasing games with so many annoying faults. Mike writes:**

VOCABULARY

1) DO have as rich a synonym set as feasible, particularly for verbs. I never cease to be amazed how many players try to use KEEP or CARRY instead of TAKE, LEAP instead of JUMP, ACROSS instead of CROSS, WAND instead of ROD etc. Every time your program fails to understand a word, the player is reminded that he is merely typing words into a stupid computer.

2)DO include in your vocabulary any major features from your descriptions and/or messages. At the very least, try to construct your text in such a manner as to suggest to the player what is, and what is not, likely to be mere window dressing. I have seen people wasting HOURS attempting to manipulate features just meant to provide a bit of colour to the setting.

3)DO program for LOOK, EXAMINE and SEARCH as different verbs. This one hardly needs justifying, does it?

4)DO provide the BACK (synonymous to GO BACK and RETURN) command, especially if your passages twist a lot, it is not fair and highly unrealistic for the player to be unable to backtrack to the last location, except in special circumstances.

5)DO provide the VOCABULARY command. One of the most frustrating features of all (but one!) adventures I've seen is having to guess what the programmer thought to be a reasonable vocabulary. The command is a must for verbs. It can be argued that listing nouns as well may give too much away. The list could, however, be restricted to nouns referring only to the objects and situations already encountered by the player.

6)Do provide the USE verb, even if the response is just a quip, e.g. 'Use . . . use . . . I really detest the way some of you humans issue the vaguest sort of commands and expect the fine details to take care of themselves. You'll have to be more specific than that!'

7)Do at least try to code for TAKE ALL and DROP ALL. Though I have to acknowledge from personal experience that this may present unexpected and formidable programming problems.

SYNTAX

1)DON'T make your parser too clever for the rest of your program. It is all very well to be able to type commands in a natural sounding subset of English. Make sure, though, that your program can respond in a reasonable manner to the unforseen complex commands the player is bound to try, and your parser will happily parse. If you don't, your parser will expose and exaggerate the weaknesses of the rest of the program.

2)DON'T rely on constructions of the type GO STUMP. This is not purist nitpicking. You are (or at least should be) aiming your adventure at novices as well as dedicated adventure freaks. Remember that GO STUMP (and similar atrocities) will be the last thing a novice will think of and may get distinctly irritated as a result.

3)DO specify the reason for a failure to parse a player's input. 'I don't understand that!' just isn't good enough. What is it the program failed to understand? One of the words? Which one? The syntax? Where? However, avoid the classic putdown of which *Zork* in particular (our version at least) is guilty: DIG results in a response of You must supply an indirect object!' In the true spirit of the classic original, the response should be simply: Dig what?'

4)If you do allow a complicated command structure, DO provide a facility to edit and resubmit the last command. The nowadays popular AGAIN (to resubmit the last command) is not really all that useful, and neither is the abilty to chain your commands with AND (or similar).

GEOGRAPHY

1)DO make the map of your adventure largely geographically consistent. The player will have to draw it sooner or later and you will save him or her a lot of unnecessary work and frustration.

2)DO allow movement in the eight compass directions, instead of the more usual four. It adds enormously to the credibility of your world.

3)DON'T introduce mazes just for their own sake. Personally I enjoy maze mapping, but it turns out few players do. Mostly they try to avoid maze mapping if at all possible. This is not to say the mazes are out of bounds, but there must be a point to them — a twist of some sort, which converts a maze to be laboriously mapped into a problem to be solved.



4)DON'T describe simple locations as complex ones. It is ridiculous to describe (for example) a single location with a single exit leading to somewhere else altogether as a dense jungle' or a golden valley'.

5)DO, however, provide some genuinely complex locations within which the player can move, even if you actually allow only two different positions within such a location (the famous 'two-pit room' is an example). You have to take care, however, to make any major features (especially the ones not hard-wired into the description) visible from all positions within the location, unless there are obvious reasons why they should not be visible.

6)DON'T conceal exits without suggesting a reason why there might be concealed exits in a particular location (say, ground is covered in dense mist making stairs down invisible, or the room is full of boulders — implying that some exits may be hidden behind boulders, etc.)

I won't comment on this myself at the moment but I'd like to hear what you have to say on Mike's suggestions. In particular I'd be most interested to hear the views of adventure authors on this subject!

In the December issue Jerry Vaughn **and** Rhys Davis **asked if anyone knew the whereabouts of Farflame the Dragonlord in** *Lords of Midnight*. **I must thank all the warlords who wrote to say that Farflame can be found at the Tower of Ashimar in the mountains of Ashimar. I'm also informed that Morkin is the only person who can recruit Farflame.**

Level 9's *Snowball* **is still in danger for** R. Spears **who is unable to remove the batpak from the video. To do this:** ZPF XJMM OFFE UIF TDSFXERSJFS.

Both Neil Soloman **and** John Farmery **are having difficulty finding the dragon statuette for crossing the molten lava chasm in** *Velnor's Lair*. if you cross the crevasse to the east things may become clearer. To achieve this: FYBNJOF XPPE XIJDI JT GPVOE JO GVOHJ SPPN.

Neil is also having problems crossing the river and leaving the village in *Mountains of Ket*. **Actually, Neil, I don't think it's possible to cross the river. You'll need to go east to get out of the village, and you'll need the map!**

E. Berg **from Norwich tells me that the solution given in the November issue for passing the force field in** *Planet of Death* **didn't work! You could always try a second solution:** GJSF MBTFS, GJSF MBTFS, EBODF.

Dave Havard **of Farnham has a rather sticky problem and asks:**

In Artic's *Eye of Bane*, how do I get honey from the apiary? I've tried WEAR NET, but it doesn't understand WEAR or anything like it.

Actually, I also thought WEAR was the logical verb when I first played it. However, try: UISPX OFU.

Dave is also having trouble finding a safe place to drop objects in *Mountains of Ket*. **This appears to be a problem afflicting many explorers. I'd guess you need to:** GFFE BOE DIRJO UIF HVBSE EPH.

D. Levett **from Bromley asks:**

How do I get into Tylon's castle in *Kentilla* and how to I get through the Door of Destiny in *Tower of Despair*?

To cross Tylon's moat, I'd say you need help from Caradoom. To pass through the Door of Destiny you will first need objects from EFTQBJS BOE IPQE. **If you find this useful, maybe you could let me know how (if) you pass the Angel of Death.**

I'll finish this month by asking a question for Simon Webster **of Sheffield. How do you get the halter from the harpies in** *Perseus and Andromeda*? **I must confess to never playing this game.**

This month's £12 of software goes to Mike Arnoutov, if I don't lose his address first!

VOTING FOR THE ADVENTURE CHART

The CRASH Adventure Chart has picked up considerably since we first introduced it, with more and more votes coming in every day! To make life easier for sorting, we are now providing a separate write-in form, so please use it for the Adventure Chart, and not the one included at the bottom of the Hotline details. If you are voting on both charts, you may send both forms together in the same envelope of course.

How to register your votes

There seems to have been some confusion in the minds of voters for the Adventure Chart, so to clarify the situations, here's how we do it. You may vote for **as many titles as you wish** (not just five as in the Hotline Chart) and you may award any of them points out of ten. So, for instance, you might vote for seven titles giving each of them ten points if you think they are worth it, or only three and give them one each. These votes are then added up for each title and the total is divided by the number of people who voted for the program resulting in an aggregate figure. From these figures, the top thirty adventure games are taken in descending order.

Phoned-in votes are accepted over the Hotline **(0584 3015)** in the same way (please state that you are voting for the Adventure Chart at the beginning), and may also be written in letter form without the use of the coupon if you prefer.

Adventure Chart Prize Draw

And don't forget that, like the Hotline Chart, you can win prizes! Each month we draw a winner from the voters, who receives £40 worth of software and a CRASH T-shirt, with four runners-up each getting a T-shirt and a mini-subscription to CRASH for three months.

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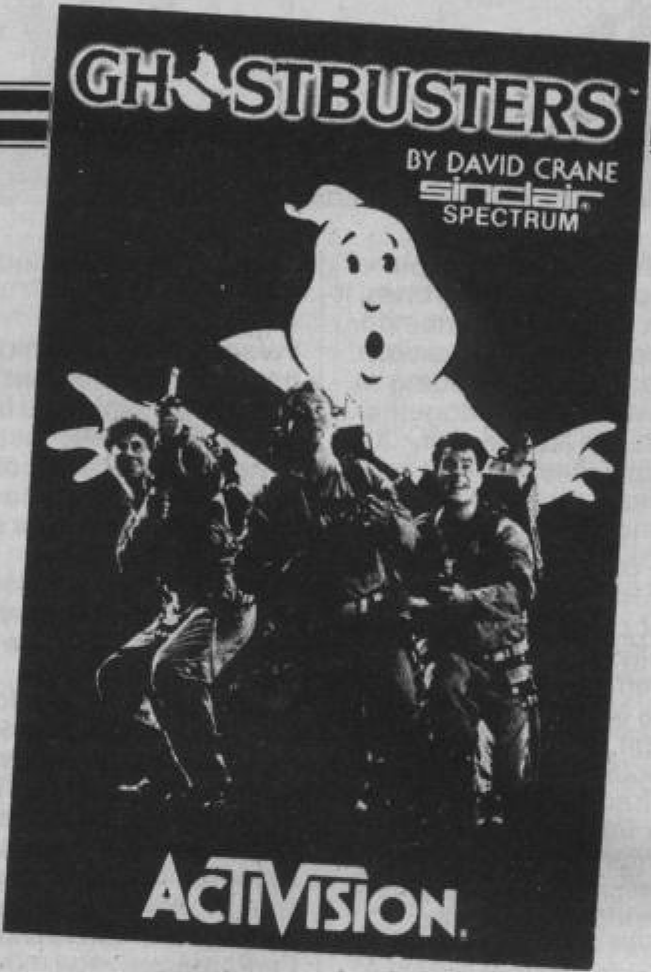
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GHOST-BUSTERS

Producer: **Activision**
Memory required: **48K**
Retail price: **£9.99**
Language: **machine code**
Author: **David Crane**

It's doubtful that anyone can have missed the film *Ghostbuster* over Christmas, so the background to this game from Activision needs little explanation. The Spectrum release of *Ghostbusters* has been completely overshadowed by the CBM 64 release which was timed to be on sale before the film even opened in December. And most of the fuss over the game has been occasioned by the CBM 64 version with its super soundtrack. The Spectrum version also uses the *Ghostbusters* theme, but somewhat less successfully of course.

Ghostbusters is more of a strategy game than an arcade game, based on the idea of running a Ghostbusters Franchise to clean up the city of paranormal manifestations. To begin your franchise you need to enter your name and account number if you have one (being carried over from a previous game). If you haven't got an account number the computer will allocate you a starting sum of £10,000. Next you must select one of four vehicles which have various capacities for carrying ghostbusting equipment and speeds, and of course they each cost more than the last. Having purchased a vehicle, the next step is to equip it. Monitoring equipment includes the PK Energy Detector, Image Intensifier and Marshmallow Sensor. Capture Equipment includes Ghost Bait, Ghost Traps and the Ghost Vacuum. Storage Equipment includes the Portable Laser Confinement System. All these items have their own prices, and the starting sum will not allow you buy lots of everything, so game experience is valuable in making these decisions, and the equipment has important functions. The PK energy detector warns of approaching Slimers; image intensifiers make slimers easier to see when trying to catch them; the marshmallow sensor warns of the dread Marshmallow Man; ghost vacuums suck up roamers; ghost trap traps catch and store slimers once the bait has attracted them; and the portable laser confinement system holds up to ten slimers in the vehicle, thus saving you trips back to GHQ.

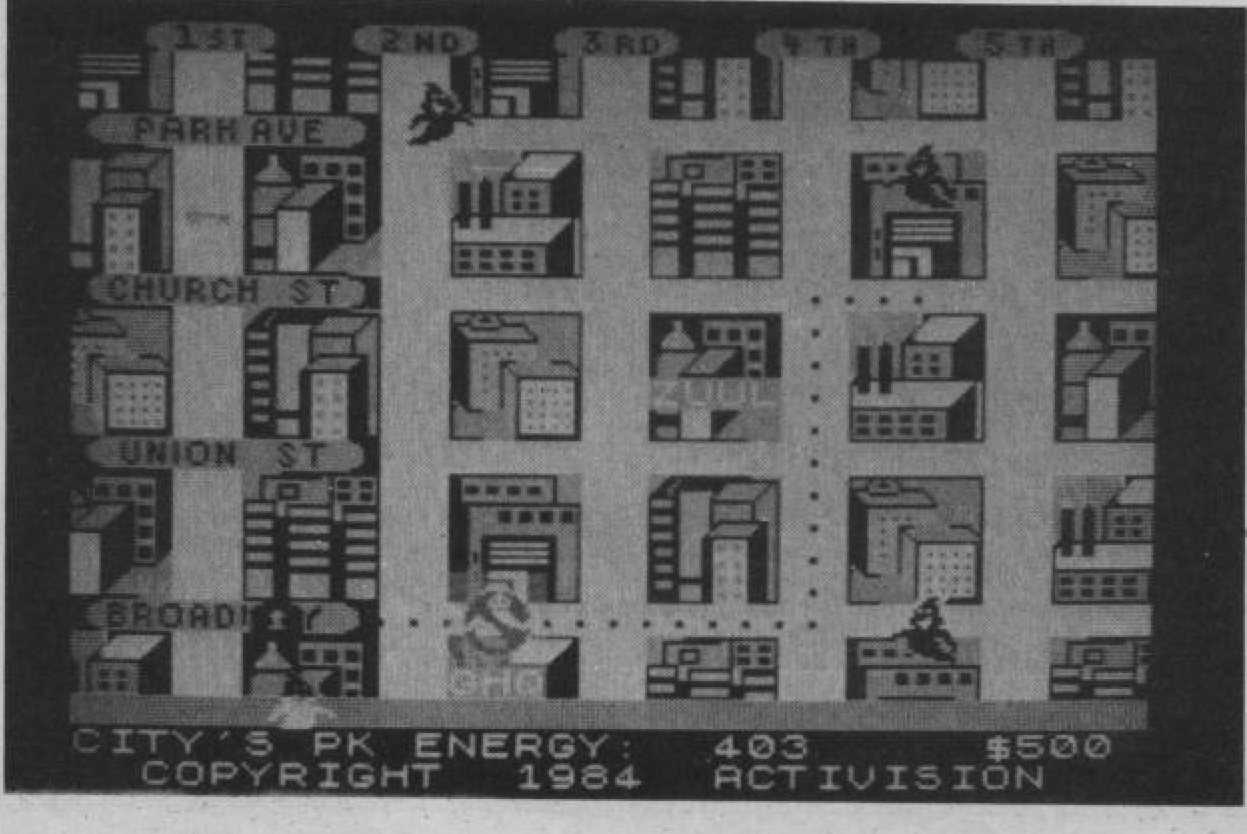
The game proper begins with a map of central New York with Zuul's Temple marked in the centre and GHQ at the bottom. Red flashing buildings indicate the presence of ghosts. The object is to cleanse the buildings and suck up roamers which are trying to make their way to the Temple of Zuul. From the map, a route may be selected and then the screen cuts to an overhead view of your vehicle on the road. Roamers can be sucked up by pressing the vacuum button at the right moment. On arriving at the building, the screen cuts again to a side view of the building, and you can see your ghostbusters at its base. Traps must be laid and then the two busters turn on their negative ioniser packs and aim the beams to trap the ghost between, without letting the beams cross over — very important that.

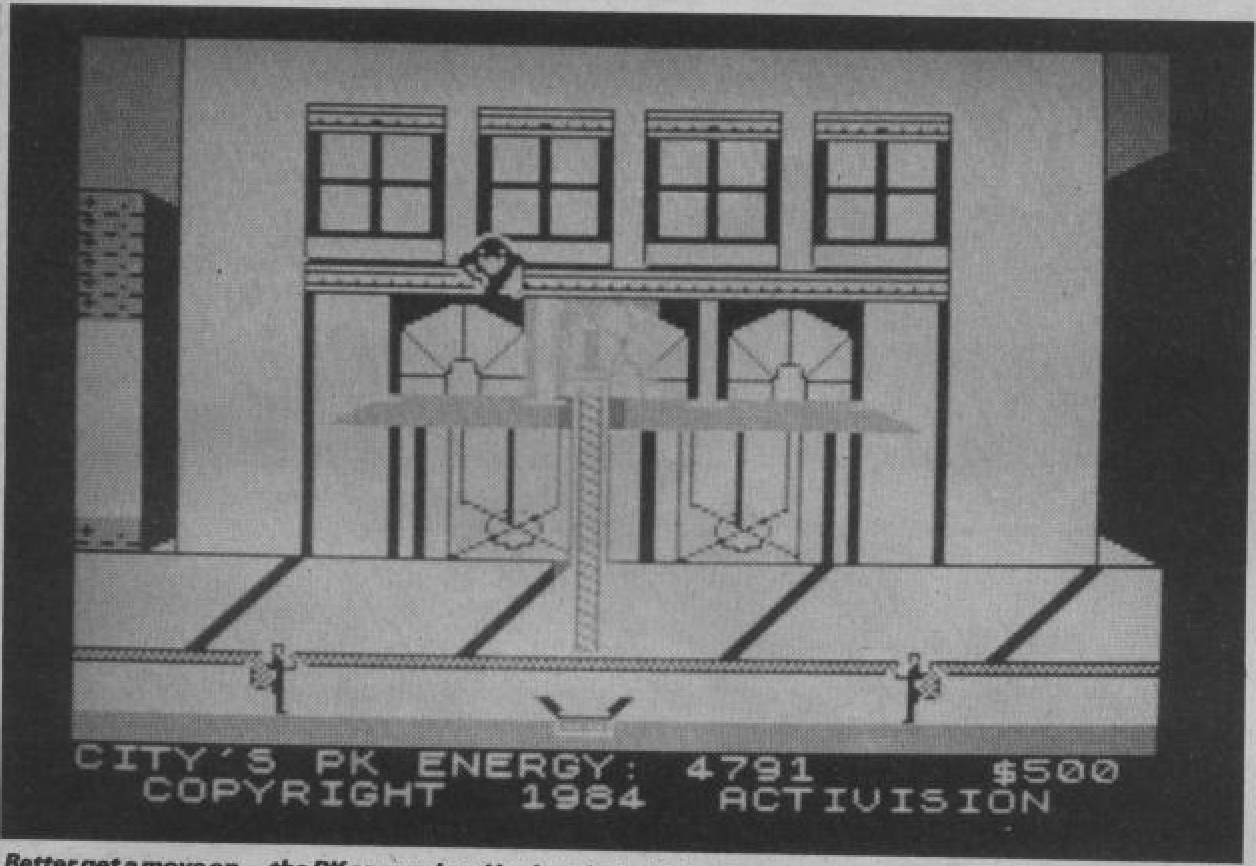
The more ghosts you capture the higher your credit rating goes. The game ends when the Gatekeeper and Keymaster join forces at the Temple of Zuul in which case you will not have earned more money that you started with, or you do have sufficient credit but fail to sneak two ghostbusters into the entrance of Zuul, or the same thing but you do succeed in getting them in.

CRITICISM

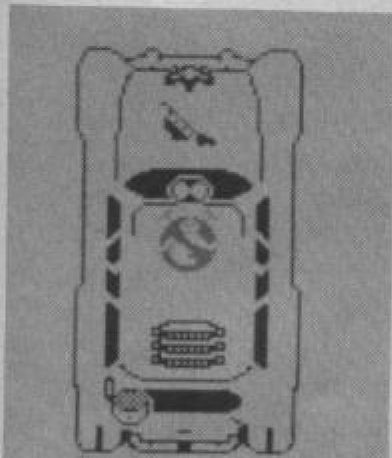
● 'This game was released to coincide with the feature film. Seeing the earlier CBM 64 version before it an easy comparison can be made. Obviously the CBM has got better looking graphics and sound than the Spectrum. I take the pleasure to say that the graphics are no different on the Spectrum version whatsoever, although the sound track on the Commosdore version really did give it a nice playable rhythm as continued throughout the game. The Spectrum version does have sound and the Ghostbusters theme at the beginning of the game, but this is all really. Oddly enough because there is no sound or, should I say, no synthesised continuous tune the game definitely seems to lack something. This does go to show that the game itself lacks distinctly in content. More often than not there

With a low PK energy figure for the city, things look okay as the Ghostbusters set off.





Better get a move on — the PK energy level is alarmingly high. The trap is sprung — and misses! Another spook free to leave for the Temple of Zuul.



seems to be little to do. While trying to catch a slimer with a trap I found that a slimer was too lively to be able to be caught and also it tended to wander too much to one side of the screen and not to use the entire playing area. Several people that I know were eagerly awaiting the arrival of the *Ghostbusters* Spectrum version. I have the sad news to inform them that this game is not up to scratch and won't have any real lasting appeal, and at the price is a total rip-off.'

● *'After hearing a lot about the* Ghostbusters *film I couldn't wait to get my hands on a Spectrum version. After seeing the £10 price tag I was expecting something as good as the film, unfortunately this was not the case. On the whole the game tended to lack atmosphere, this was possibly due to the distinct lack of sound. The game was generally unexciting and the tasks rather uninspiring. After managing to bust a slimer I was unable to return to the street scene†map, my efforts still proved fruitless after several attempts. On the whole I felt that the game was bad value for money and lacked addictive qualities. The graphics were acceptable but I've seen much better for much less. Basically it just left me cold.'*

● '*Ghostbusters* for the Spectrum is bound to be compared with the CBM 64 version which is a bit unfair because the thing that made the Commodore version was the sound, which as we all know cannot be reproduced well on the Spectrum, though what is there isn't bad for a one channel speaker. The graphics are quite good but everything is just a trifle slow for me. *Ghostbusters* isn't that addictive because it's slow starting up, also I don't know whether our version was bugged but when you caught a slimer, the only thing you could do was start the game over from the beginning again. Overall *Ghostbusters* has been a disappointment.'

COMMENTS

Control keys: Q/A up/down, O/P left/right and Z to fire
Joystick: Kempston, Sinclair 2, Protek, AGF
Keyboard play: fairly responsive
Use of colour: well used on the map screen especially
Graphics: above average to good
Sound: good tune, though a little flat, otherwise not much during play
Skill levels: 1
Lives: N/A
General rating: average quality but boring and poor value for money.

Use of computer	**78%**
Graphics	**72%**
Playability	**60%**
Getting started	**69%**
Addictive qualities	**48%**
Value for money	**31%**
Overall	**60%**

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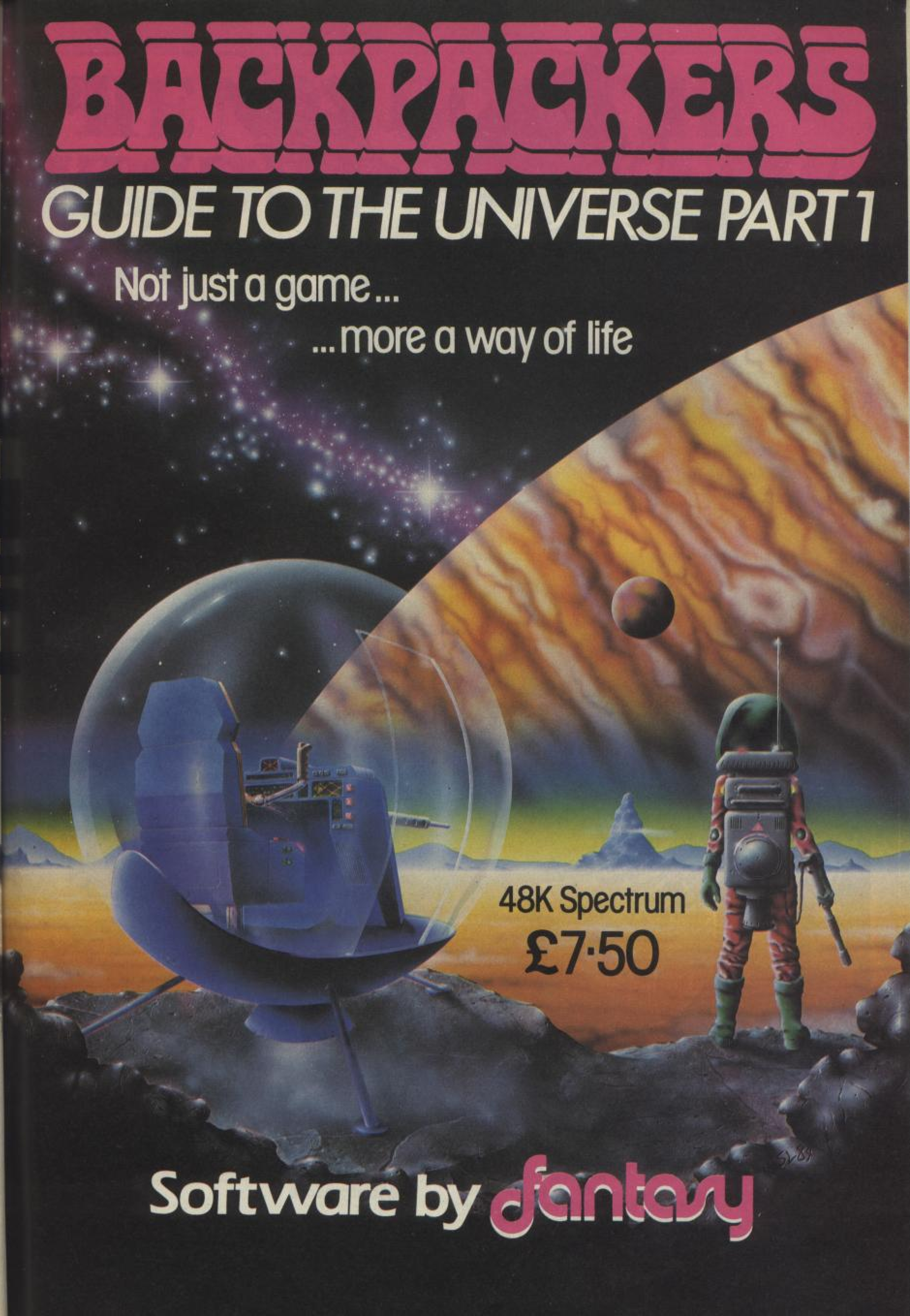
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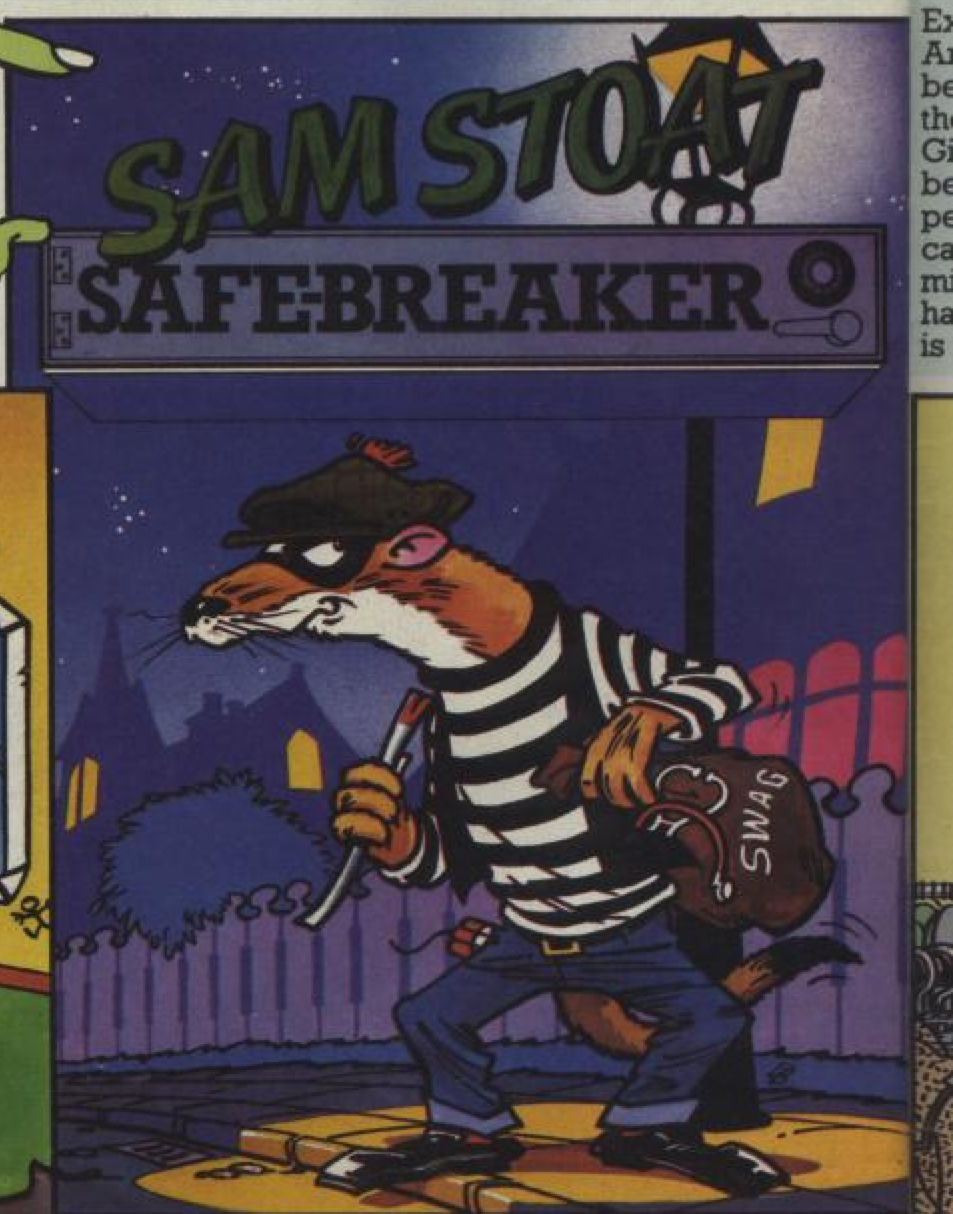
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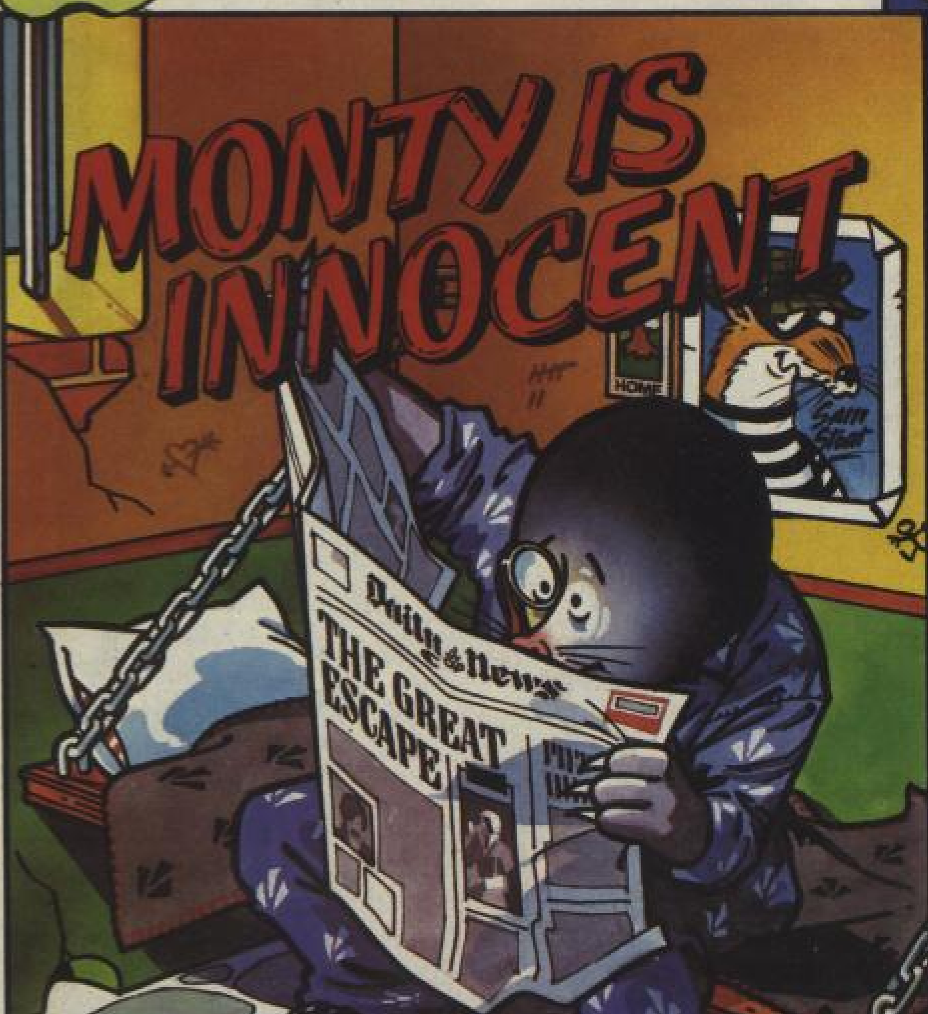


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At the dead of night Sam leaves his lair and makes for the large houses where, with the aid of some everyday tools and a good measure of cunning, there are wealth and riches for his delight (not to mention his pocket). It couldn't be easier. . . sneak into the house, find the safe; light the blue touch paper and stand well back. Then out into the night with the ill-gotten gains! But Sam has reckoned without one or two adversaries who are more than a little determined to get the better of him. . .

A cry of national outrage! Poor Monty banished for life amongst murderers, arsonists, the lowest of the low. Fear not, this Mole is innocent, and plans are in hand to rescue your Superhero. Who is the mysterious masked rodent willing to challenge death for his lifelong friend? What are the evil forces working in Scudmore Prison?

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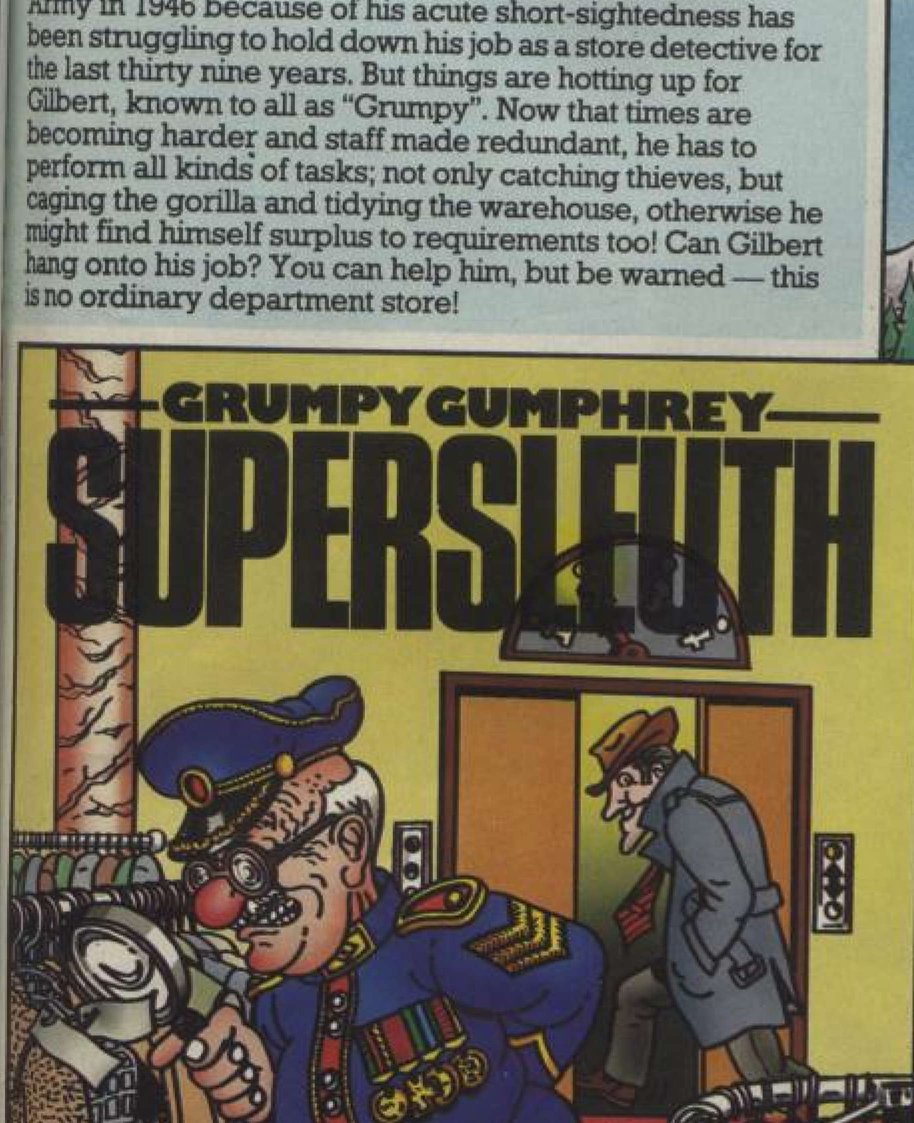
Suicide Express	CBM 64 £7.95
Monty Mole	CBM 64 £7.95
	Spectrum 48k £6.95
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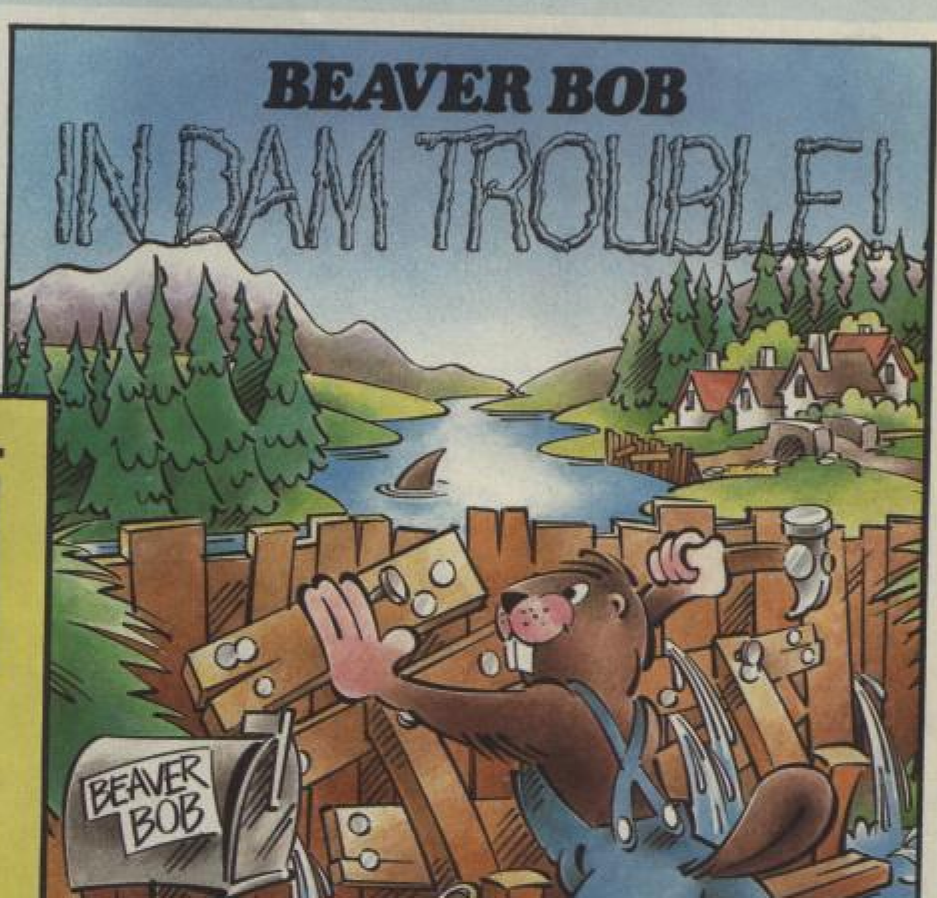
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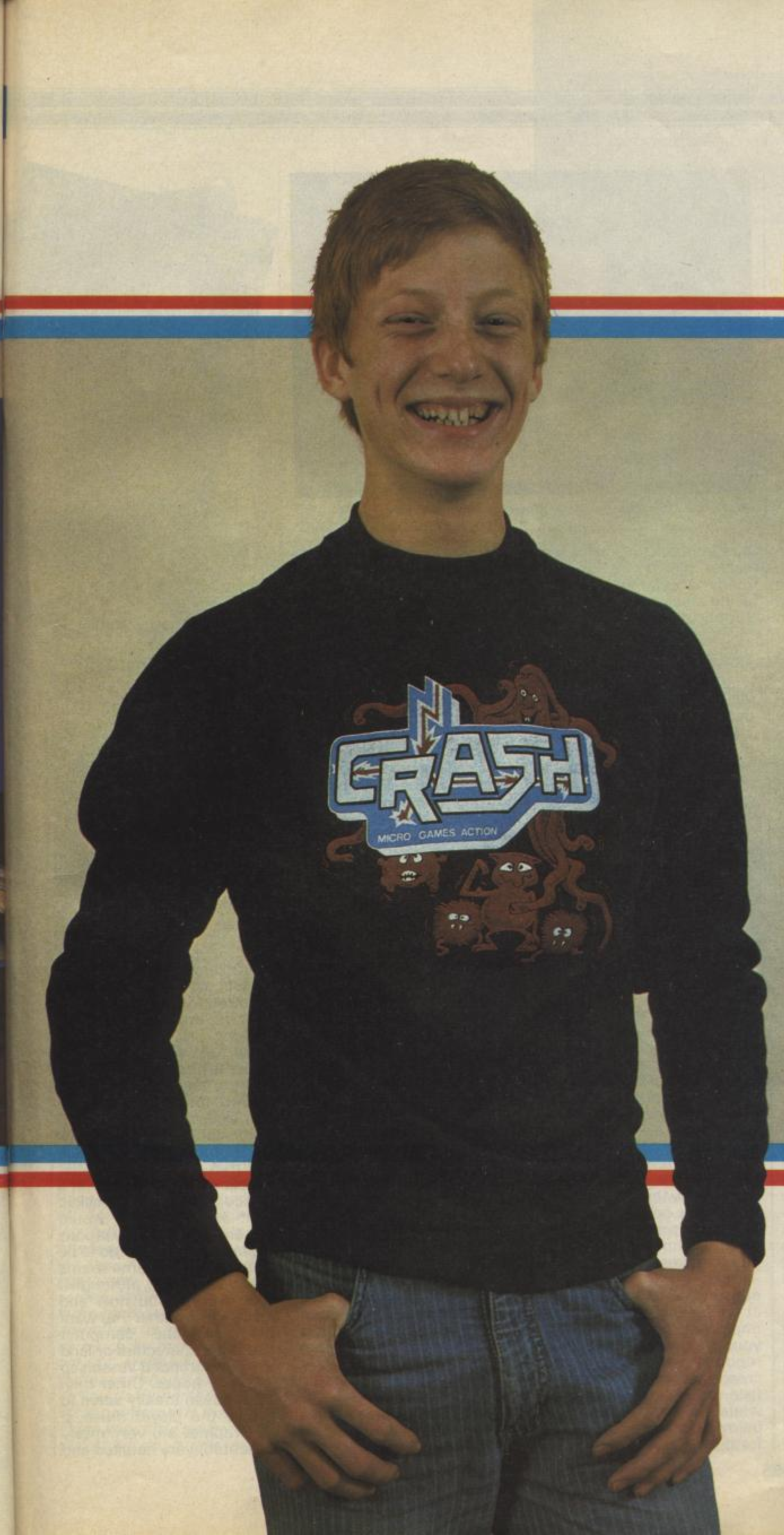
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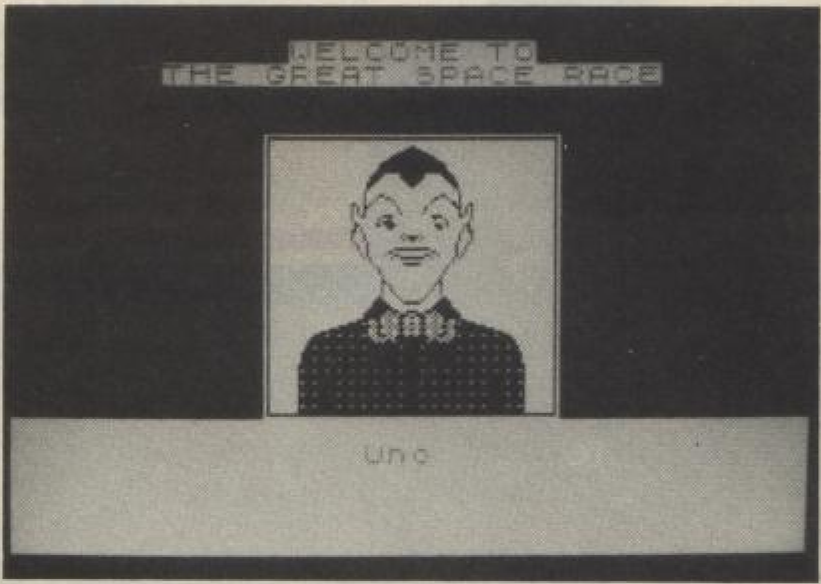
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CRASH
MICRO GAMES ACTION

THE GREAT SPACE RACE

Producer: **Legend**
Memory required: **48K**
Retail price: **£14.95**
Language: **BASIC**



First off, all the characters introduce themselves to you



Legend has created its own legend through the release of only two games, *Valhalla* which incorporated the graphic technique of 'Movisoft', and this new release, *The Great Space Race* with the advanced technique of 'Movisoft2'. Movisoft is a grand term for animated graphics, which were seen to good effect in *Valhalla*, but by implication the graphics are intended to resemble a real film in motion.

The Great Space Race comes in a sizeable hard box containing the tape, a poster and a hefty 56 page booklet. Opening the book you find instructions on playing the game and a series of black and white comic strips which tell a short story on all 12 characters you will primarily encounter. The purpose behind the comic strips is to give the player some insight into the strengths and character of the racers you will have to hire or fight. These are all introduced to you at the commencement of a game, and it is with the characters' faces that 'Movisoft2' comes in.

The basic story is that in the galaxy and at a time past, a marvellous alcoholic beverage had been developed called Natof (it seems the first ever consignment of the yet un-named drink was filled in on the form with 'Name To Follow', and as it never did and Name To Follow was a bit of a mouthful, it became abbreviated to Natof). This beverage is in enormous demand since it never leaves a hangover and contains all the right constituents for a healthy and happily inebriated life. The galaxy is divided into four arms of its spiral, Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta. In each arm there are 24 space stations in desperate need of Natof. Your task is to supply them all. To do this you must hire four racers, one for each sector and arm their ships ready to cope with the race using stocks of your starting supply of Natof.

The first section of the game consists of the hiring and arming. Each of the main characters appears in the viewscreen and his or her details appear below in the information panel plus the hiring price. In the top information panel you are told to press for yes or no, and a graphic representation of a clock ticks the seconds away for you to make your choice. On selecting a crew member, you must then select the weapons from a choice of lasers, missiles and smart bombs and a shield per craft. There is a time limit on making all these choices before the race commences, and racers' fees tend to drop as the starting time approaches. Understanding the character and abilities of the racers is important in choosing them and apart from the comic strips, much intelligence is gained through playing the game. Choice of weapons is also dictated by the arm of the galaxy in which the racer will be operating – some are more violent and lawless than others. The better policed ones will also bring problems with the often corrupt police chasing you for taxes.

Once the race starts in earnest, the bottom information panel becomes more important, for it is here that your racers and enemies will report to you. The viewscreen shows the animated face of the communicant, while their message appears below. This may take the form of your racer saying another racer's ship is in sight, should they attack? (any racers you have not hired are automatically working for the computer). It may be the other way round, with your racer being attacked by another. It may be one of the four computer controlled characters, the incredible Ghengis, the pirates Zanik and Krone or the police threatening to attack one of your racers unless you pay so much Natof over. The outcome of any combat, which is graphically represented, will depend on the shield strength, weaponry and character of the racer and ship in question, as well as that of the attacker.

Reports come in constantly about the Natof deliveries being made by your hired racers, and decisions may be required at this point to send the racer in a different direction. More money may have to be paid out for ship repairs, otherwise the racer will simply drop out, or for sobering up time (they drink Natof constantly). The game ends when either all 96 space stations have been supplied, or when your four racers have been knocked out of the race. The game operates in real time, so time spent making up your mind is time wasted. Scoring is done by the number of space stations supplied, the total time taken and the average time that each delivery took. In this sense there is no real winner, only an improving of times and numbers of deliveries.

CRITICISM

● '*The Great Space Race* has now been advertised for quite a long time and has been eagerly awaited by the general public. I was quite surprised to see it arrive in a very flashy video-style case with a huge booklet. It is extremely nicely packaged I thought, will this reflected in the game? After glancing through the booklet I decided to load the game. For a program that's meant to contain such a lot of content, it loaded in a relatively short time. It presented several characters from whom I could make a choice of those I wanted for the race. A time limit is imposed so quick thinking is necessary to make up your mind. the choice is hindered by the fact that the text window is not cleared for each character. This does lose you considerable time and isn't really fair if you have to read text and make a decision. After selecting your character for a particular ship, you are asked what weapons you would like, and I chose all weapons available (well I wanted to be protected)! The game seems to play on its own, although it does prompt you now and again, like whether you want to attack the computer controlled characters or land on booby-trapped vessels to get more booze. Other than this it doesn't really seem to involve the player much at all. Graphics are very nicely presented, very detailed and

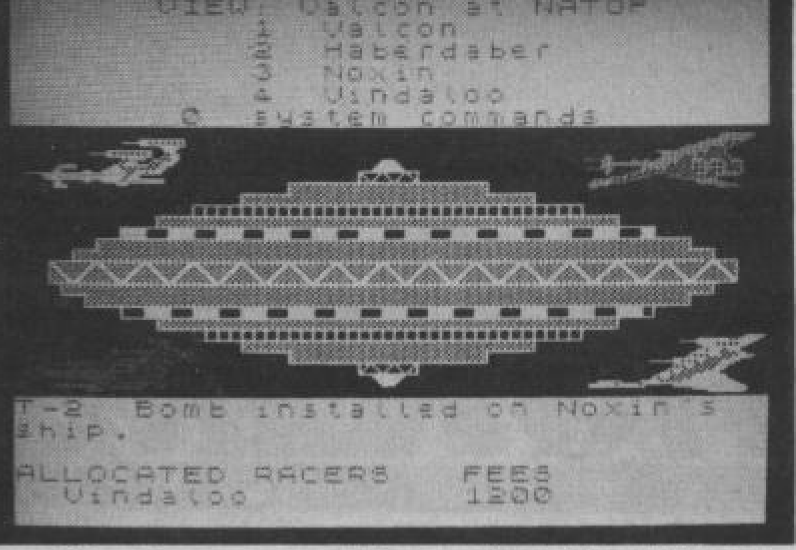




I must say I enjoyed looking at the different people displayed on the screen. Battle scenes, though, were a bit sketchy and didn't contain much. They seemed a bit pointless as they didn't prove anything. As I had all weapons available, anyone that attacked me didn't seem to stand a chance and died at once. Overall *The Great Space Race* has seemingly been pushed as a far greater game than it actually is, it doesn't reflect, for such a high price, much value for money.'

● *'It must be very hard for a software house today to know exactly what the public wants or expects of them. The trick is to find the magical ingredient. Legend have set themselves quite a task to follow up* Valhalla, *and with* The Great Space Race *they have not succeeded. Movisoft2 sounds exciting but it only reflects the minor elements of animation in the racers' and other characters' faces in the viewscreen. While these are very large and well drawn, the animation is pretty limited, as much by memory I suspect as anything. Although the game begins to build up as you go along, the greatest disappointment is that it provides very little really for the player to do. It falls out as being very much like any simpler strategy game where you are constantly offered options and must either say yes or no and then sit back at look at the consequences. You have no control over the battle scenes beyond having made the right decisions in character and weapon selection earlier. The information box at the bottom is very confusing, as it does not clear the previous line of text until that scrolls up out of sight. Consequently it is hard at a moment's glance to see where you are or what is happening, and as some decisions are critical and must be taken quite rapidly, a disaster can go by default. Perhaps the kindest thing to say is that Legend have bravely tried to do something that is really beyond the capacity of the Spectrum, or indeed any home computer without extra memory or instant read write storage facilities. But even then, the result lacks playing content and comes across as a cold and somewhat inaccessible program.'*

● 'Movisoft implies, to me at any rate, that the animation will be frame by frame, and actually go a long way to look like a real film. As it stands though the 3D scenes given (3D being one of the best ways of showing animation) are not smooth whatsoever – the representations of the ships and the space stations use three to four frames to come from a dot to full size, while in the battle scenes the graphics dart about in space and dimension like something out of a very early ZX81 game. The graphics of the playing characters are very good, on the other hand, but they too, could hardly be said to be animated, beyond the odd eye or mouth movement. Moving over from the animation, the key response doesn't seem very good for a machine code game, taking sometimes up to three seconds – but wait, haven't we been here before? *The Great Space Race* turns out, as did *Valhalla*, to be virtually all in BASIC, the only machine coded parts are for graphics and for graphic handling routines. This explains the slowness of the response and also means that the sort of modern compression techniques used to pack a lot of game into a small space haven't been employed, resulting in a game which lacks in content apart from the excellent packaging. Expectations were rather high on this game and it's a shame that they've been let down to such an extent.

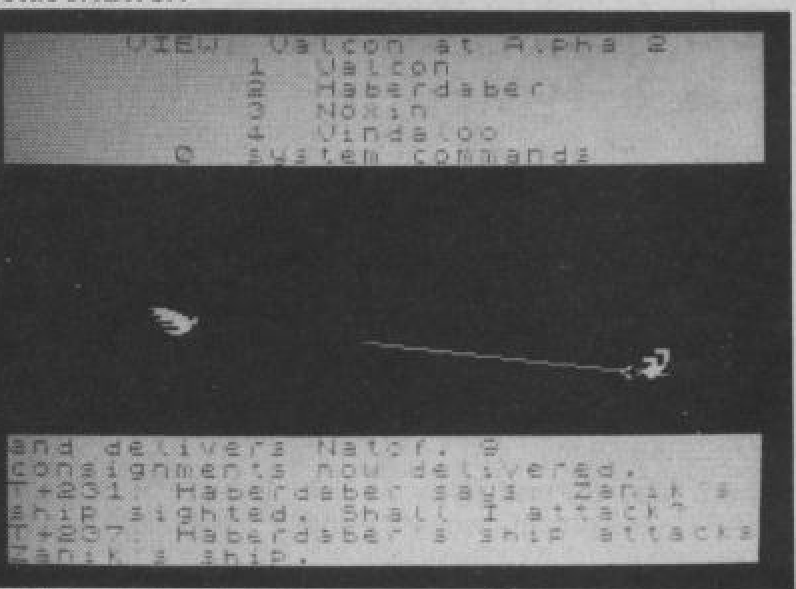


One of the galaxy arm space stations eagerly awaiting a delivery of NATOF.



Zanik demands a ransom. In the information panel one of the peculiarities of the text presentation can be seen where NATOF is spelt with a capital N one time and a small n next time.

Haberdasher's ship attacks Zanik's ship in a fight to the death over a bottle of NATOF.



COMMENTS

Control keys: 'yes' or 'no' key presses to screen prompt
Joystick: doesn't need one
Keyboard play: very simple, but slowish response time
Use of colour: above average, reasonably varied
Graphics: very large, in most cases quite detailed but some insignificant
Sound: hardly any
Skill levels: 1
Lives: not entirely applicable, but four racers
Screens: several
Special features: lavish packaging and large instruction booklet
General rating: a great disappointment.

Use of computer	58%
Graphics	69%
Playability	25%
Getting started	80%
Addictive qualities	10%
Value for money	20%
Overall	**44%**

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Not too many changes right at the top this month, just a bit of shuffling. **Mikro—gen's** *Pyjamarama* makes a small climb up to this month's number 7 slot, while the first big climber is **Ultimate**'s *Knight Lore*, up 13 places to number 10, closely followed by the big Christmas hit from **Realtime**. *Starstrike* comes straight in at this month's number 12 slot. The mid teens to twenties show little real change but **Gargoyle Games** are showing strongly with *Tir Na Nog* up to 24. *Darkstar* from **Design Design** comes straight in at 26 with *Skool Daze* also straight in at 31. Other new chart entries are **American Football** from **ASP**, **Durell**'s *Combat Lynx* at 36, *Backpackers Guide to the Universe* from **Fantasy** at 37, *Doomdark's Revenge* from **Beyond** at 42 and **Creative Spark**'s shoot em up *Black Hawk* at 47.

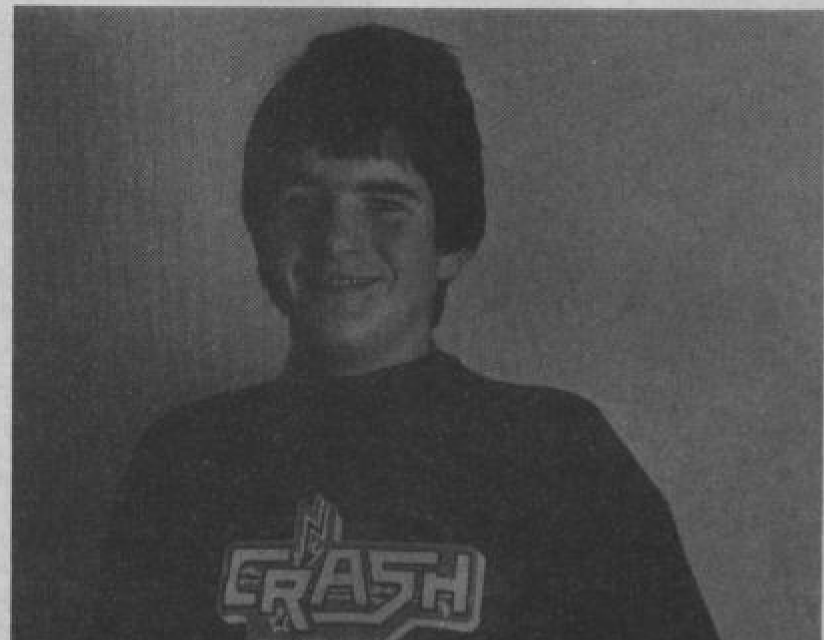
In the Adventure Chart **Beyond**'s *Doomdark's Revenge* has leapt straight in at number one! *Kentilla* makes a small improvement to number 3. Last month's number 1, *Sherlock, slips down to 8th place. Waydor* from **I.M.S.** is holding on well with **Bug-Byte**'s *Twin Kingdon Valley* leaping up 16 slots. *Temple of Vran* improves its position slightly, just behind the final part of the trilogy, *The Final Mission*, and with *Mountains of Ket* at 21, that means all three parts of the Ket Trilogy are in the chart. Two surprises are *Tir Na Nog* and *The Legend of Avalon*, both doing well in the main chart, and here showing that adventure players also enjoy action graphic adventures. Also nice to see the Quilled *Denis Through the Drinking Glass* from **Applications** back in the chart.

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TITLE	PRODUCER
1 DOOMDARKS REVENGE	
2	
3	
4	
5	

This moth's Hotline Winner is **Michael Budden** from Cheam in Surrey. The four runners-up are; **Jonathon Thompson** from Rainham, Gillingham, Kent; **Paul Grant**, from Shipston-on-Stour, Warwickshire; **Stuart Carter** from Banbury, Oxon; and **Jerry Elsmore** from South Croyden, Surrey.

TOP 50 FOR FEBRUARY

(Figures in parenthesis indicate last month's position)

* Backpackers Guide to the Universe — the full name is too long!

1	(–1)	**SABRE WULF** Ultimate
2	(–3)	**DALEY THOMPSON'S DECATHLON** Ocean
3	(–4)	**MONTY MOLE** Gremlin Graphics
4	(–2)	**LORDS OF MIDNIGHT** Beyond
5	(–5)	**MATCHPOINT** Psion/Sinclair
6	(–7)	**JET SET WILLY** Software Projects
7	(10)	**PYJAMARAMA** Mikro-Gen
8	(–8)	**FULL THROTTLE** Micromega
9	(–9)	**ATIC ATAC** Ultimate
10	(23)	**KNIGHT LORE** Ultimate
11	(–6)	**UNDERWURLDE** Ultimate
12	(—)	**STARSTRIKE** Realtime
13	(13)	**LUNAR JETMAN** Ultimate
14	(16)	**MOON ALERT** Ocean
15	(17)	**TLL** Vortex
16	(12)	**THE LEGEND OF AVALON** Hewson
17	(15)	**MANIC MINER** Software Projects
18	(18)	**KOKOTONI WILF** Elite
19	(14)	**AUTOMANIA** Mikro-Gen
20	(19)	**WHEELIE** Microsphere
21	(11)	**CODE NAME MAT** Micromega
22	(20)	**CHUCKIE EGG** A&F Software
23	(28)	**THE HOBBIT** Melbourne House
24	(40)	**TIR NA NOG** Gargoyle Games
25	(29)	**BEACH-HEAD** US Gold
26	(—)	**DARKSTAR** Design Design
27	(24)	**3D DEATHCHASE** Micromega
28	(22)	**TRASHMAN** New Generation
29	(20)	**STOP THE EXPRESS** Sinclair
30	(37)	**FRANK N. STEIN** P.S.S.
31	(—)	**SKOOL DAZE** Microsphere
32	(—)	**AMERICAN FOOTBALL** A.S.P. Software
33	(33)	**ADA ASTRA** Gargoyle Games
34	(47)	**CAVELON** Ocean
35	(27)	**SHERLOCK** Melbourne House
36	(—)	**COMBAT LYNX** Durell
37	(—)	**BACKPACKERS G.T.T.U.*** Fantasy
38	(25)	**PSYTRON** Beyond
39	(42)	**THE QUILL** Gilsoft
40	(48)	**FIGHTER PILOT** Digital Integration
41	(21)	**KOSMIC KANGA** Micromania
42	(—)	**DOOMDARK'S REVENGE** Beyond
43	(43)	**ANT ATTACK** Quicksilva
44	(39)	**POGO** Ocean
45	(26)	**WORSE THINGS HAPPEN AT SEA** Silversoft
46	(46)	**ANDROID 2** Vortex
47	(—)	**BLACKHAWK** Creative Sparks
48	(49)	**JASPER** Micromega
49	(45)	**JETPAC** Ultimate
50	(38)	**SCUBA DIVE** Durell

VOTE for the CHARTS



The winner this month in the Adventure Chart is **Paul Meadows**, Bartley Green, Birmingham, and the four runners up are: **Alan Thomas** from Mile End, Coleford, Gloscestershire; **C.P. Womg** of Plymouth, Hants; **Miss A. Pacey** from Forest Hall, Newcastle-on-Tyne; and **Jon Ward** from Hullbridge, Essex.

CRASH ADVENTURE CHART

(Figures in parenthesis indicate last month's position)

1	(—)	**DOOMDARK'S REVENGE** Beyond
2	(–2)	**LORDS OF MIDNIGHT** Beyond
3	(–5)	**KENTILLA** Micromega
4	(–3)	**OUT OF THE SHADOWS** Mizar
5	(–6)	**THE HOBBIT** Melbourne House
6	(–6)	**SNOWBALL** Level 9
7	(–7)	**RETURN TO EDEN** Level 9
8	(–1)	**SHERLOCK** Melbourne House
9	(11)	**TOWER OF DESPAIR** Games Workshop
10	(–8)	**WAYDOR** I.M.S.
11	(13)	**THE FINAL MISSION** Incentive
12	(28)	**TWIN KINGDOM VALLEY** Bug-Byte
13	(20)	**TEMPLE OF VRAN** Incentive
14	(12)	**QUEST FOR THE HOLY GRAIL** Dream
15	(–9)	**THE HULK** Adventure International
16	(21)	**TEN LITTLE INDIANS** Channel 8
17	(19)	**VELNOR'S LAIR** Quicksilva
18	(—)	**TIR NA NOG** Gargoyle Games
19	(15)	**COLOSSAL ADVENTURE** Level 9
20	(14)	**CIRCUS** Channel 8
21	(26)	**MOUNTAINS OF KET** Incentive
22	(18)	**ORACLE'S CAVE** Dorcas
23	(—)	**THE LEGEND OF AVALON** Hewson
24	(10)	**URBAN UPSTART** Shepherd
25	(—)	**DENIS THROUGH THE DRINKING GLASS** Applications
26	(29)	**HAMSTEAD** Melbourne House
27	(23)	**SHIP OF DOOM** Artic
28	(16)	**GOLDEN APPLE** Artic
29	(27)	**MESSAGE FROM ANDROMEDA** Interceptor
30	(25)	**LORDS OF TIME** Level 9

Reviews

STRONTIUM DOG (The Killing)

Producer: **Quicksilva**
Memory required: **48K**
Retail price: **£6.95**
Language: **machine code**
Author: **Paul Hargreaves of Channel 8**



Let the Killing Begin — the start screen which offended a number of reviewers.

To readers of the comic 2000AD *Strontium Dog* will be no stranger. Interestingly enough, the even more famous hero (?) Judge Dredd will soon be turned into a computer hero as well as Games Workshop are even now working on the project. Back to the story: Johnny Alpha is a Search and Destroy agent, a bounty hunter of the future, he is also a mutant or Strontium Dog. He has arrived at a contest where the galaxy's most vicious murderers are in a fight to the death. Johnny must destroy them all to rid the galaxy of both killers and the dictators who preside over the contest.

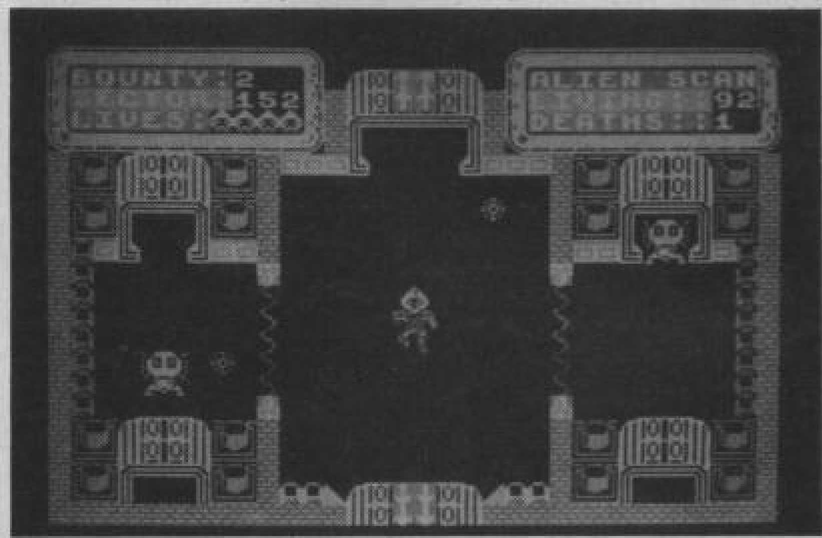
The game begins with a screen where Johnny Alpha is brought before the dictators as in a Roman amphitheatre and one of them declares, 'Let the killing begin!' as he happily plunges a dagger into some hapless victim's chest. In the way of modern computer games advertising other games, however, there is a slogan etched into the dais which says, 'Borzak woz ere' – one of Channel 8's games.

The Killing is played in a vast complex of rooms, or sectors. Some of these are merely tunnels to other sectors, but the real action begins in those rooms that consist of a central passage with what resemble rabbit hutches on either side. These are the cages in which the vicious murderers live. They emerge from either the top or bottom of their cages, into the open and fire energy bolts which rebound in the centre passage. Strontium Dog must fire at them when they appear and try to kill them, while dodging the energy bolts which travel in a diamond shape, narrowing their field before expiring. Occasionally in the transverse passages a murderer will be lurking, armed to the teeth.

At the top left is a status panel with the score in bounty points, the number of the sector you are in, and lives left. On the right is an alien scan which shows living aliens (starts at 93) and deaths scored. Because of the size of the complex, a map would come in handy in order to ascertain that you have got all the vicious murderers.

CRITICISM

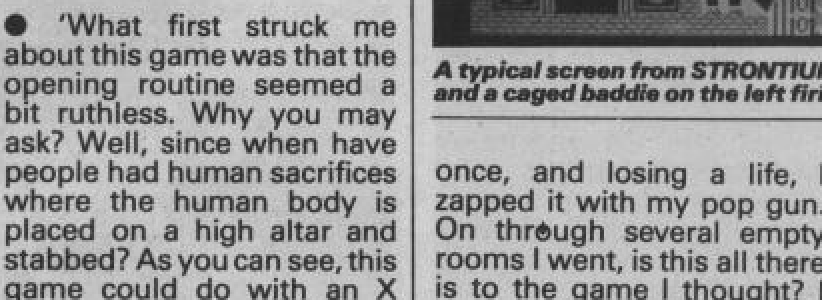
● 'What first struck me about this game was that the opening routine seemed a bit ruthless. Why you may ask? Well, since when have people had human sacrifices where the human body is placed on a high altar and stabbed? As you can see, this game could do with an X rating on the front of it. Into the game I went, with fighting wits and a pop gun (it seemed that to me). Moving down through a couple of empty rooms, I found forcefields, were they to keep me out or to keep someone else in? Then, not to my surprise, a little meany popped out of a hole and shot something at me. I don't quite know what it was, but it seemed to bounce about for about ten seconds. After being electrocuted by it once, and losing a life, I zapped it with my pop gun. On through several empty rooms I went, is this all there is to the game I thought? I walked through a room with a forcefield either side of me, and very pretty it was too with its flashy colours. Yes, I think this is all there is to this game. Well, as for content, it's barely worth making the effort to say anything. It seems to me that P. Hargreaves (the author) could have increased the content a hundredfold and made it quite an addictive game, but as it stands, I cannot recommend this game at all.'



A typical screen from STRONTIUM DOG, with the hero in the centre and a caged baddie on the left firing bolts of energy.

● *'*The Killing *is a very good idea but QS haven't done much with it which is a shame. The graphics are jerky and not at all animated and the sound is poor. The playing area seems quite a small maze of interlinked rooms which you easily get lost in. Killing the aliens is fairly easy, but there are a few which are almost impossible. I didn't really enjoy playing* The Killing *as it was so basic. The thing that annoyed me was the scene at the beginning of each game.'*

Dead in a corridor with a triumphant murderer under the arches.



● 'Quicksilva have always been producers of very good games, sometimes brilliant ones, and on the whole all those games have been high in content, so *The Killing* comes as a disappointment. So many of the rooms are devoid of life and one suspects they are just there to confuse the player on purpose. The action can be fun, but it's repetitive and overall the game lacks anything to appeal. I've nothing against adaptions of ideas from other media, but I do think a game should combine some of the elements from the original. Not a thrilling Quicksilva game, this one.'

COMMENTS

Control keys: 9 or Q/8 or A up/down, 6 or O/7 or P left/right, zero or M to fire and X for electro flares
Joystick: Kempston, Sinclair 2
Keyboard play: sensible keys but not terribly responsive and firing is not possible while moving
Use of colour: good
Graphics: large characters, a bit jerky and not much animation
Sound: fair
Skill levels: 1
Lives: 5
Screens: lots
General rating: poor.

Use of computer	52%
Graphics	64%
Playability	52%
Getting started	53%
Addictive qualities	30%
Overall	42%

TRIO

Producer: **Silicon Joy**
Memory required: **48K**
Retail price: **£5.95**
Language: **machine code**
Authors: **Jim Elvery, Andrew Miller, Mark Alexander**

Silicon Joy is a division of Kevin Tomm's Addictive Games, and it has recently released a few programs, of which *Trio* is one. *Trio* consists, appropriately enough of three separate arcade games on one tape, which means each game costs you a fraction under the budget price of £1.99. They are *Dracula's Castle*, *Ascot* and *Chaotic Caverns*.

In *Dracula's Castle* you guide a little black man around several rooms and corridors. Doors to the rooms are closed and you score points by opening as many as possible and by turning on as many lights as possible. The rooms are filled with swarming bats which will stun you. Finding and then eating garlic will turn you green, and while you are this tasty shade you can eat bats which also increases the score. Every hour on the hour (about 1 minute and 20 seconds real time) Dracula rises from his coffin and dashes around shutting doors, turning off lights and killing you if he discovers you. A large grandfather clock ticks away the game minutes and a chime is heard before Dracula rises.

The second program on the tape is *Ascot*, which as the name implies is a gee gees game set on the hallowed turf and may be played by up to 6 players. Each player is given £100 at the start and the player with the most money after 6 races is the winner. The smallest bet allowed is £1 and all bets must be in whole pounds, other than this there are no limits. Betting allowed is WIN, PLACE for a horse to come either first or second, or EACH WAY. When it comes to betting you are shown the number, colour, form, name and odds for each horse. Form is a line of six digits which indicate where a horse finished in its last six races, with the right-most digit being the most recent race. If you wish to bet you enter the amount plus a letter to indicate which of the three types of bet it is you are placing.

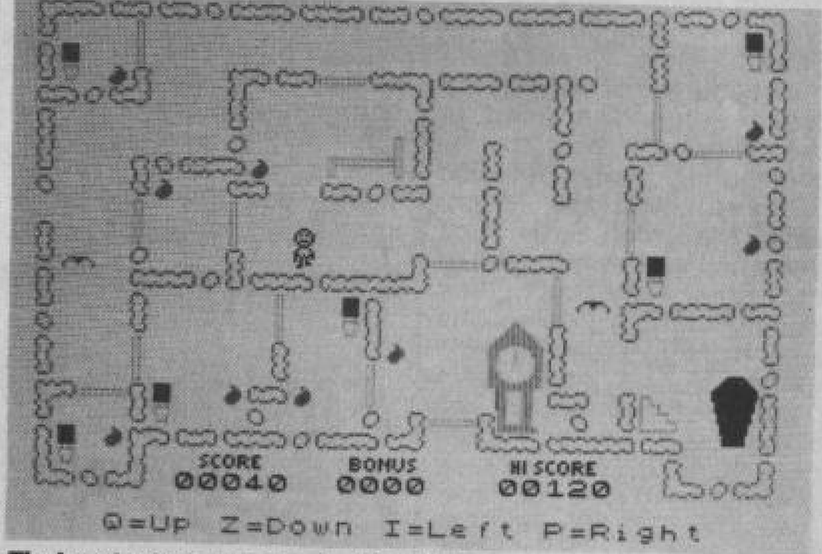
Six runners are offered before the screen cuts to the track with the six runners animated along its length. Then after the race the results are displayed.

Chaotic Caverns is a sort of grid runner-cum-painter game. A series of screens follow on from each other, showing a simple grid of white an a colour ground. You control a small car which leaves a trail of colour behind and the object is to colour the entire track while avoiding the chasers. These begin as two and increase by one as you progress from screen to screen. The screen layouts also become more complex.

CRITICISM

● 'The first offering, *Dracula's Castle* is a fairly reasonable game but not a game that will keep the average player interested for long. It may be of appeal to the younger player. The graphics are fairly simple, as is to be expected. *Ascot* is a typical, bet on the horses game. This has simple graphics, it's in BASIC too. Again, hardly addictive. *Chaotic Caverns* is a very simple concept using extremely simple graphics but it is frustratingly challenging, which does lead to a certain degree of addiction. It's great for sharpening the reflexes. Due to this latter game, the pack is just into the average rating.'

● *'Trio cannot be great value for money as the old saying goes, you pay for what you get, and if three games are put on one cassette for £5.95 then the games cannot really be of very high quality. This is borne true with this compilation. What is odd about this collection is that the games are very different from each other and not related one tiny bit to each other. Okay, this does give some selction but I think that people who buy games would have preferred to have similar types of games together instead of three unrelated ones. The games themselves are not of a high standard, just very average. The graphics on all the games are quite primitive, although* Dracula's Castle *does have some nice characters.* Chaotic Caverns *seems to me to be a very primitive machine code game, one that would be ideally suited to the ZX81.* Ascot, *where does this come into the collection _ it's really the odd man out? Overall, not really great value for money, and I'm sure there are better, cheap games on the market.'*



The best looking game from TRIO, this is DRACULA'S CASTLE and the dreaded Count is still a-sleeping.



● 'Compilations are hardly new, and with very few exceptions have never really provided good entertainment or value. *Trio* is sadly no exception to the rule. The most fun is the last one, *Chaotic Caverns*, but it looks ever so old. None of them is likely to hold the attention for more than a few minutes really.'

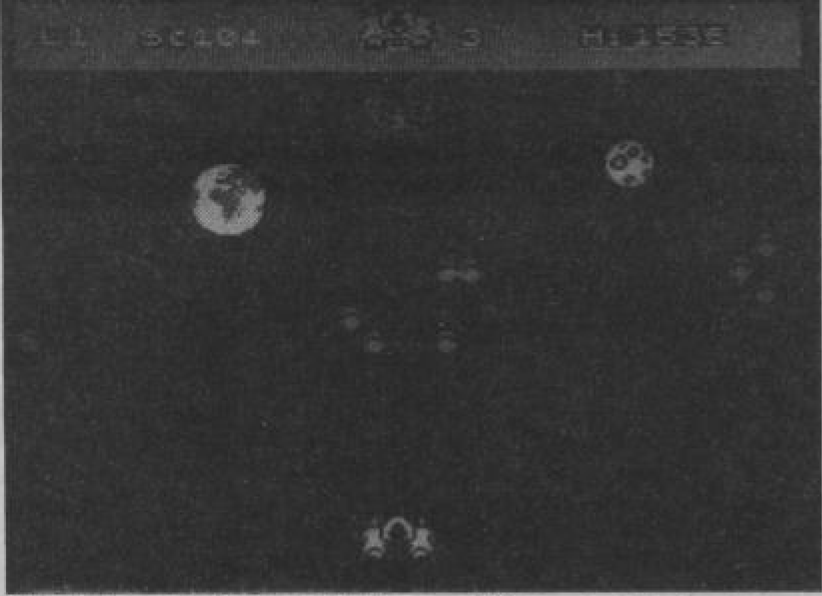
COMMENTS

Control keys: vary from game to game
Joystick: Kempston
Keyboard play: responsive
Use of colour: average
Graphics: below average to average depending on game
Sound: fair
Lives: 3 except in racing game
General rating: below average generally, not very addictive.

Use of computer	60%
Graphics	44%
Playability	38%
Getting started	58%
Addictive qualities	32%
Value for money	49%
Overall	47%

TERRA FORCE

Producer: **Firebird**
Memory required: **16K**
Retail price: **£2.50**
Language: **machine code**
Author: **David Harper**



The Earth and the Moon are in danger of being eaten alive by a space monster in a the Centipede-like TERRAFORCE from Firebird.

Get this! Terra Man, the (you guessed it) sole survivor of Earth's galactic fleet, must defend his home planet (that's Earth folks) and the Moon against (wait for it) Ygothulu (no, Firebird can't pronounce it either) the planet devourer and his marauding hordes of Demon Bombers and Solar Pods. Can Terra Man stem the terrible onslaught? Will he be home in time for tea? Watch this space!

Another of the Firebird budget range, *Terra Force* is really a 'Centipedes in Space' game. The unpronounceable pot of Yoghurt is a green dragon-like thing at the top of the screen, commuting daily between the Earth and the Moon, while the green Solar Pods are small globes attached to each other at the start of their zig-zag descent down the screen. As in any Centipede game, firing at them destroys them, breaks the chain and sends them dancing off in fragments, as does hitting one of their deceased kind. Terra Man sits in his machine at the base, able to move left and right and upwards by four blocks, firing desperately. Should he score five direct hits on the planet devourer, the green thingy explodes and the Earth is saved – for a moment anyway. After clearing one screen the Demon Bomber appears, hurling red character blocks down on Terra Man to add to the fun. There are five speeds to select from.

CRITICISM

● 'Firebird have done pretty well with their budget range and I suppose you've got to expect that not everything will be up to *Booty*'s standard. *Terra Force* isn't, although it is an enjoyable shoot emp up of a simple kind. Nothing great, nothing bad, and certainly okay at the price. The graphic characters are all quite large and jolly and the sound is alright. The game lacks the complexity of a real Centipede game (if you could call those complex to begin with!) but the pods are quite hard to shoot down, especially when the Bomber is having a go as well. Average.'

● '*Terra Force is another of those near-copies from Firebird. This time it's nearly a Centipede, except the centipede is a string of alien craft. The graphics are not very good and there are the sort of sound effects you would expect from this sort of game. Playing the game was a bit boring, even with the five speed levels (which don't make that much difference).*'

● 'This game is a sort of Centipede type but it takes place in outer space. Graphics to say the least, are to the point, yes, the bare necessities. I don't know what some of them are but they certainly don't like me and come at me in swarms. The parent alien at the top seems to vanish and reappear quite unfairly, making it hard to destroy it. To make life more difficult on the second stage, a very colourful 'flea' or 'fly' or whatever it is, constantly drops bombs on you and must be shot. I find this game lacking in content with not a great deal to do other than destroy the aliens. It seems very primitive, the sort of thing I would have expected years ago on the Spectrum. the graphics move by the block, which makes the game quite speedy, but of course it makes the graphics look unsophisticated. On the highest speed level, the graphics move at such a pace that it is difficult to aim before the object has moved, and thus requires no real skill element whatsoever. Overall, one of Firebird's unsuccessful cheapies that can't really be recommended.'

COMMENTS

Control keys: H to ENTER/B to SYM SHIFT up/down, A to G/Z to V left/right, Y to P for fire
Joystick: Kempston
Keyboard play: very responsive, but oddly laid out
Use of colour: average
Graphics: fair
Sound: limited to continuous effect
Skill levels: 5 speeds
Lives: 3
General rating: below average.

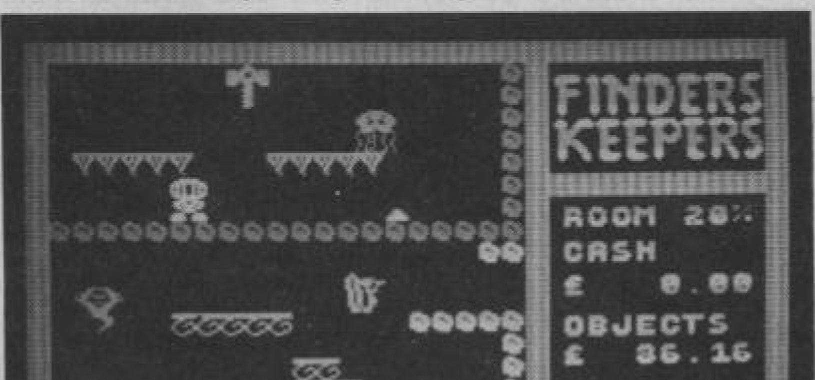
Use of computer	53%
Graphics	50%
Playability	40%
Getting started	58%
Addictive qualities	39%
Overall	40%



FINDERS KEEPERS

Producer: **Mastertronic**
Memory required: **48K**
Retail price: **£1.99**
Language: **machine code**
Author: **David Jones**

An unusual combination of maze and platform game makes Mastertronic's best yet budget offering in FINDERS KEEPERS.



Here's the first of a batch of new year Mastertronic budget games. In *Finder Keepers* the King of Isbisima is upset because he has nothing to give his daughter for her birthday. As a magic knight you have been ordered to find the Princess Germintrude a very special present. Should you succeed you may be invited to become a Knight of the Polygon Table.

To carry out your appointed task, the king transports you to Spriteland which is a welter of platform-type screens and two mazes teeming with electro-historic nasties that sap your energy and useful objects in the

shape of small white triangles.

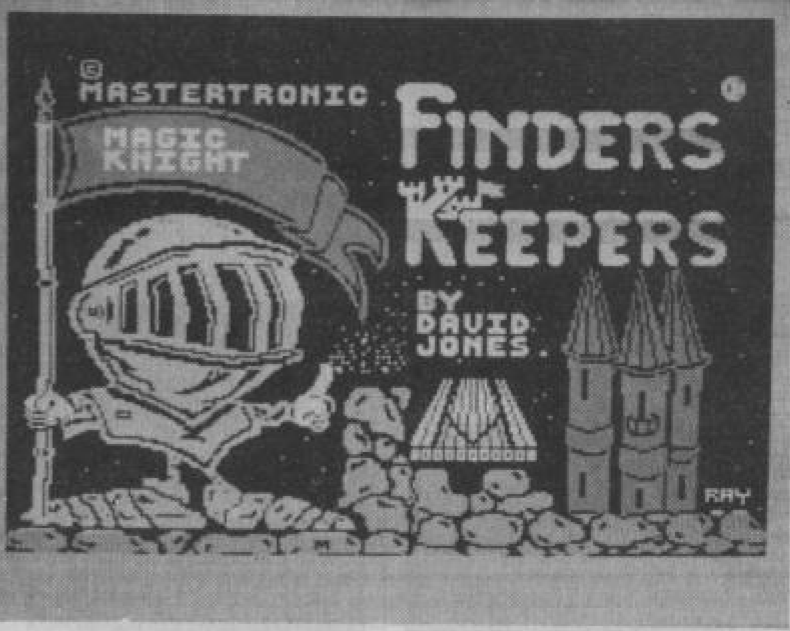
There are two possible objects in this game; either you may elect to collect as many valuable objects as you can and escape from the castle, or you may collect the treasure to please the king and princess and join the polygon table. *Finders Keepers* is an arcade adventure, and 'adventure' in quite a literal sense, because when you are next to a white triangle you can examine or get it. On getting, you are given an inventory of what you already carry, and when the limit of five objects is reached you have the choice of dropping something first. Some objects react to form other substances, sometimes more useful than the original two, sometimes less, so finding a philosopher's stone is good, because it will transform a lump of lead into a bar of gold. Scoring is in two sections; percentage of rooms explored and cash value of objects collected. Some objects are useful in as much as they can be traded with the ghostly traders who waft about, others have a function which will help you on your way.

The screen display is a square with a status panel on the right. The platform screens are all linked horizontally and vertically. Control is in four directions, up being used when on the move to jump. In the mazes, the knight remains centre screen, while the large maze scrolls across.



CRITICISM

● 'It's been a while since Mastertronic have brought out one of their cheapies. I must say that I was rather cautious while loading this game having seen some of their previous attempts at programming, but to my amazement, on playing this game I found that it would easily sell at £5.95. Yes, it is that good. *Finders Keepers* has a comprehensive joystick selection menu with some concise instructions, and there is also an option to define the keys. Graphics on this game are fast, smooth and very well animated. The plot is quite strong, making this a purposeful game and not just a collecting game, with your ultimate task to please the king and princess.



I wonder why people are more often than not pushing cheapies that would quite easily sell at the full average retail price. It seems to me that they are losing out somewhere, but Mastertronic has always had an odd strategy to marketing, and it seems to work, and definitely will work with this game.'

● *'Most Mastertronic games have disappointed from the word go, although some have been quite playable, they have all lacked a lot in the graphics.* Finders Keepers *puts the record straight immediately with brightly coloured, imaginative and fully animated characters. The scrolling on mazes is particularly good. The idea is simple enough, but the fun comes from collecting objects – there are a lot, and of course you never know what each will be. Although each play reveals the same objects in the same place, picking up and dropping soon muddles them up and makes life more complicated. Generally, a game with pleasing and slick graphics, and enjoyable story line, and with a fair amount of addictivity.'*

● 'One element of this game that I find most pleasing and satisfying is that two objects, if thoughtfully put together will have a chemical reaction and form a (usually) valuable new object. I really think this is a neat point to the game and does tend to get the player thinking and not just trying to collect as many objects as possible. Another aspect that's pleasing is the combination of platform and maze game, two totally different skills are needed for each. There is, I suppose, an adventure type skill also needed, which goes to say that this game is dedicated to 50% thinking and 50% playing, yet it is an arcade game. One thing that I couldn't get the hang of though, was trading. I just didn't seem able to trade any of my objects – oh well, there are more things to life than making money (or is there)? To sum up *Finders Keepers* it seems to be exceptional value for money, and a distinct improvement on any of Mastertronic's previous budget games. Is this the way the software industry is headed, competition not between good games and bad games, but competition between two good games but at different prices?'

COMMENTS

Control keys: user definable, eight required, four directional and keys for Get, Trade, Droplist and Examine
Joystick: Kempston, Fuller, Sinclair 2, AGF, Protek
Keyboard play: very responsive
Use of colour: excellent
Graphics: very good
Sound: good
Skill levels: 1
Lives: 5
Screens: unknown, but many including continuous scrolling on mazes
General rating: a neat and fairly original game with good playability and excellent value at the price.

Use of computer	90%
Graphics	82%
Playability	80%
Getting started	79%
Addictive qualities	79%
Value for money	99%
Overall	**85%**

AMERICAN FOOTBALL

Producer: **Argus Press Software**
Memory required: **48K**
Retail price: **£**
Author: **P. Rawling & R. Harris**

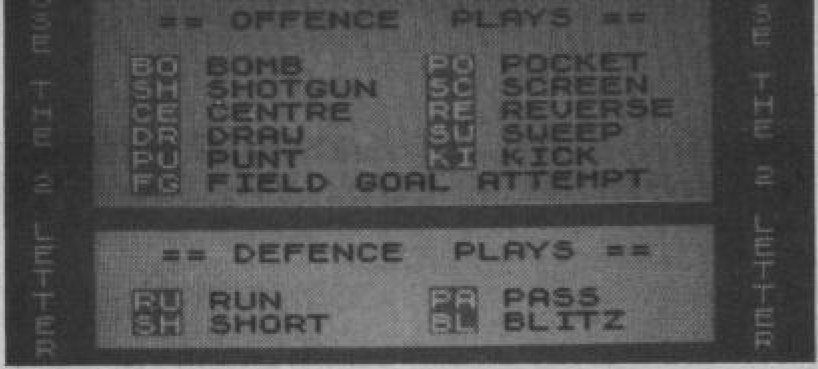
American Football has recently become a popular British TV sport for those with the patience to understand its tactical complexities and an access to Channel 4 Television. Chris 'Tipster' Passey turns from the gee gees to take a look at the armour-plated behemoths of the American football pitch. . . .

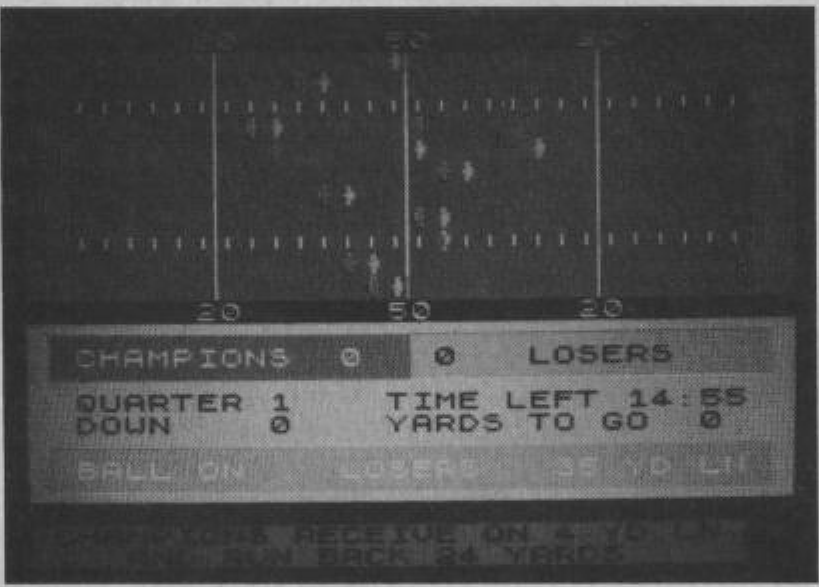
'A General stands at the head of a battle, he looks deep into the mist. He asks himself questions as to the tactical advantages of various offenses. Should he bring the artillery up, or the cavalry, or maybe they should attempt a full-blooded, bayonets-fixed charge. The mist begins to clear. Standing on his 20 yard line he observes the field. He decides upon the Blitz in a last desperate attempt to halt the opposition. . . .'



This battle is fought upon a football field, the battle is a game *American Football*.

I'm not an expert on the subject (to the north of Ludlow we lack Channel 4), but after scanning through the supplied documentation I soon became proficient in the use of words like quarter back, bombing, blitzing, huddle and interference blocking. *American Football* is a hugely strategic game in which every move has to be





The crowded field of AMERICAN FOOTBALL — a game of vicious strategy and amazing jargon.

decided upon. The choosing of the pre-set options of various offenses or defences was reasonable but I felt that I was just choosing names. After playing a while I found myself using manoeuvers for different positions with more competence.

The game is shown graphically on the screen using tiny little characters. This is not very exciting but it is better than nothing. Besides, this *is* a strategic game and not a shoot em up. Mind you, I do keep stressing that strategy type games would get a massive boost if they boasted graphics to match their other virtues; so if you are after raw excitement, then stick to zapping nasties; but if you want to exercise the cranial muscles then this is worth a try. Playing the game is quite easy, it's understanding what effects your strategies will have that is the difficult task. The sixteen or so strategical options are all entered by using the first two letters, so to bomb will be BO, and blitz will be BL. Each player takes a turn, and in a two-handed game it is better not to watch a player entering the codes, as this is called cheating!

The accompanying book provides an excellent introduction to the game and for complete beginners like myself this is a great help. I found the game to be mildly addictive, which rather surprised me as I usually find such games a little yawn-inducing to say the least. And as well as enjoying *American Football* it taught me a lot about the real thing, so that now I can't wait to watch it when we finally receive C4.

Generally I felt it would have been even better if it had great graphics; and in real life the teams can decide things on the spur of the moment by looking at the opposition's movement and position. Here it is all pre-set and you wait for an outcome which is then enacted on screen. This does tend to impair the atmosphere – perhaps cheerleaders would have helped this, but the game is still an enjoyable strategic excercise.

COMMENTS

Control keys: various inputs
Keyboard play: all prompted on screen, reasonably responsive
Use of colour: average but perfectly adequate for the purpose
Sound: not much
Skill levels: depends on opponent
Special features: excellent handbook, single player v the computer or two handed games possible
General rating: a good strategysimulation of an unusual game.

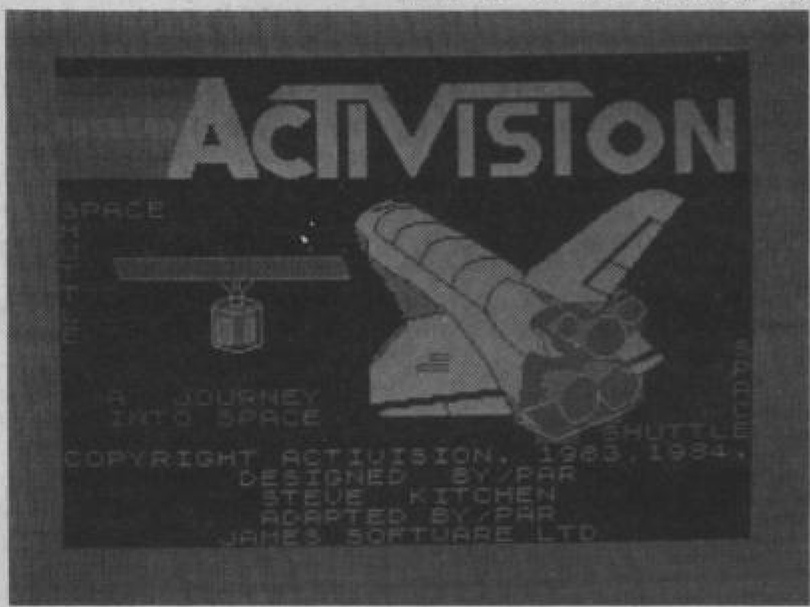
Use of computer	64%
Graphics	N/A
Playability	68%
Getting started	82%
Addictive qualities	72%
Value for money	69%
Overall	**71%**

Reviews

SPACE SHUTTLE

Producer: **Activision**
Memory required: **48K**
Retail price: **£7.99**
Language: **machine code**
Author: **Steve Kitchen**

This is the first program for the Spectrum which can be said to be a real simulation of a Space Shuttle flight. This is the 101st mission and you are at the helm of the Space Shuttle Discovery. Your target, approximately 210 nautical miles above the earth's surface, is an orbiting satellite with an intentionally programmed gyroscope problem. The more times you dock with the satellite, the worse the problem will become.



A flight consists of three separate parts, Launch, Docking and Rendezvous and Reentry and Landing. The mission may be undertaken in three ways. Flight one is effectively a demo,and unless you touch a control key, the computer will do all the work. Flight two is a simulator mode, where you control the flight but no fuel is used and the onboard computer assists you. Flight three is the real thing.

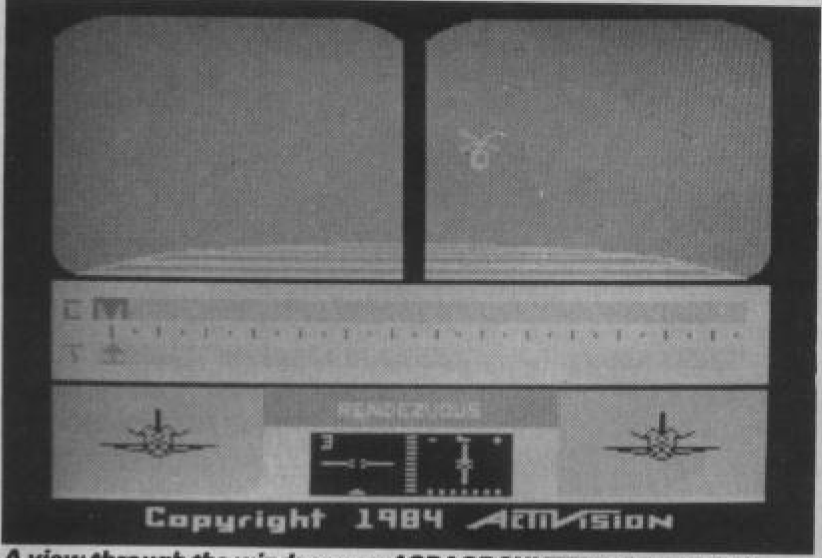
The screen display shows a view out of the viewscreen as well as instrumentation. Below the viewscreen are two bars marked T and C. These indicate the engine thrust being used. C is the computer and the pilot matches its arrow with the T arrow, using the thrust button. Additionally, during all three phases, directional controls must be used to correct the shuttle's attitude and direction. In the lower centre is a message display area and display screen which shows trajectory during launch, ground tracking screen during orbit stabilisation, docking screen when within satellite range and the reentry screen when returning to earth. Once through the atmosphere the screen switches to an ILS display for landing.

This actually puts the whole thing very simply. Accompanying the program is a highly detailed booklet with illustrations of how the various screens are used. There is also an overlay for the keyboard as a number of controls are required. The visual display includes the sky during take off, gradually darkening into space with moving stars, a 3D representation of the satellite, the intense heat of reentry, and a 3D representation of the ground and runway during landing.

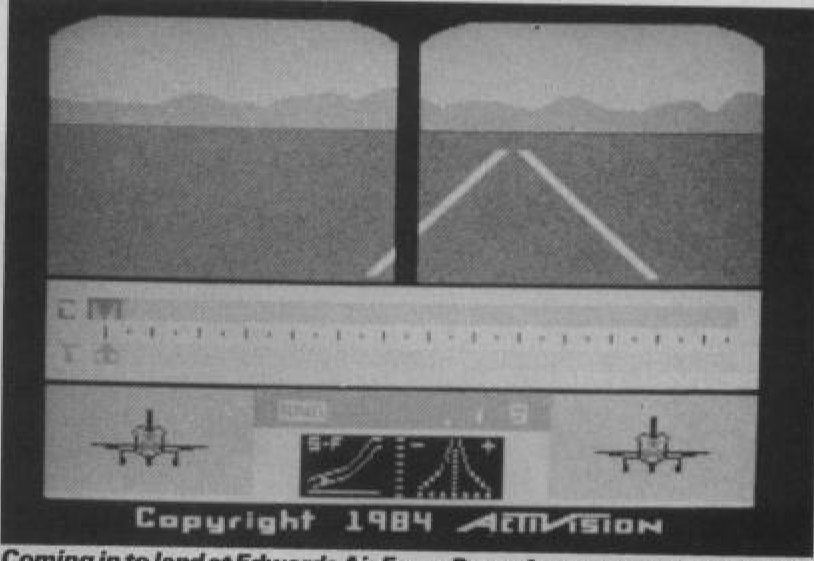
The American programmer, Steve Kitchen, is described as a master software designer, engineer and inventor who was involved in the development of digital watches and the first hand-held electronic games. He claims that the simulation in this program is very true to life.

CRITICISM

'This is the first really decent space simulation, because there is a lot to do, and it requires much expertise to successfully control the shuttle through the various phases. As a result, it feels realistic. This is backed up by



A view through the windscreen of SPACE SHUTTLE as the errant satellite hoves into sight.



Coming in to land at Edwards Air Force Base after a successful trip into space in SPACE SHUTTLE.

the very comprehensive booklet, which is full of technical terms and includes a glossary in case you do not understand them. Graphically, everything works very well, with large and smoothly executed pictures, although I got the feeling that it lacks something in atmosphere. However, the detail is all there, from the juddering clouds during the vibration of take off to the violent flashing of heat as the nose tiles burn off during reentry. The various tracking screens, apart from being essential, are well laid out, very detailed and, perhaps most importantly, they are clear and easy to see. The one real cheat you discover is when, after looking at the demo of a launch, you take the controls yourself and have a go at keeping the thrust indicator up with the computer indicator. In demo, the computer manages this as though the two were tied by a strap of steel, but when you try it, the steel turns to a very flabby elastic band! *Space Shuttle* is a reasonably sophisticated simulation much along the lines of *Flight Simulation* and should appeal to all those who enjoy such taxing programs. But beware – read the booklet thoroughly before attempting the first flight, otherwise you may be put off because the slightest deviation from the pre-determined flight plan will cause an abort of mission.'

COMMENTS

Control keys: 17 keys are required, used with an overlay. These are well grouped for their tasks, but launch can be a bit of a handful
Joystick: the instruction booklet says a joystick may be used, but nowhere does it state compatibility – the direction keys are GH leftright and YB updown
Keyboard play: responsive, although for some of the time, speed isn't the essential factor
Use of colour: quite varied and generally well used
Graphics: Generally smooth, detailed and large, with reasonably effective 3D
Sound: not much, sometimes a warning horn if something is going wrong, but overall none of it is very loud or effective
Skill levels: 3, but each mission gets harder
Lives: N/A
Screens: 4 instrument screens, and three basic viewscreen modes
General rating: an excellent space simulation with plenty of work to do, should appeal to simulation fans.

Use of computer	68%
Graphics	74%
Playability	76%
Getting started	90%
Addictive qualities	**78%**
Value for money	80%
Overall	**78%**

HAVOC

Producer: **Dynavision**
Memory Required: **48K**
Retail price: **£7.95**
Language: **machine code**
Author: **Terry Mayhew**

One thing to be aware of with *Havoc* is that the screen pictures on the cover are from the CBM64 version which might be misleading, although there is a note to the fact on the cover.

It is the year 2024 and you are an operative of the World Peace Force (WPF). Being a peace force, you are equipped with a powerful interceptor which flies from its assigned bunker, with which you may deal death and destruction. Mustapha Fracas (the Mad Mullah) has secretly purchased discarded Cruise Missiles (they have a long life) and has declared total war on his enemies. Your task is to intercept and destroy incoming missiles as each one getting through will destroy 10% of your homeland.

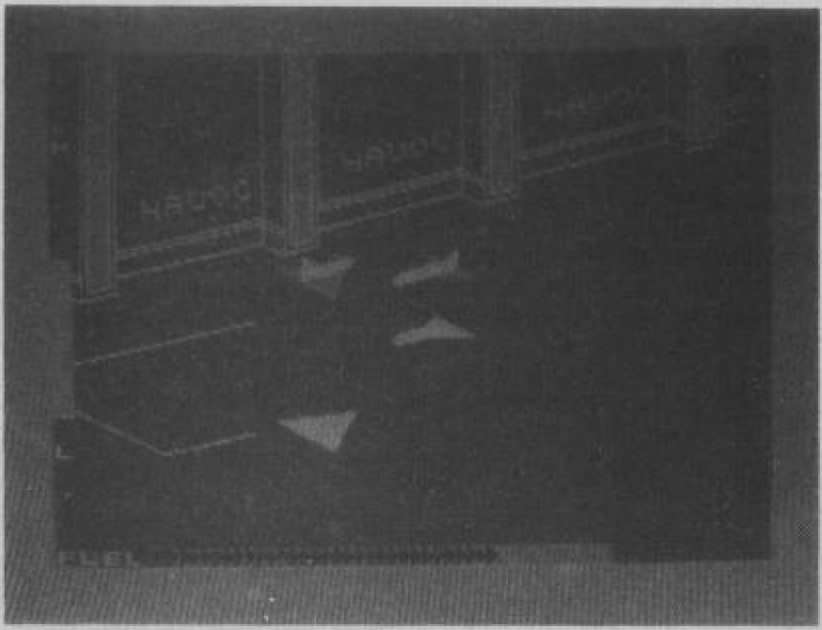
The screen display is continuously scrolling at about 60 degrees, with your interceptor shown in the centre. It can be moved left or right as well as up and down, height being judged by the shadow on the ground and a level indicator on the left of the screen. The only other instrumentation is a fuel bar at the base of the screen. Refuelling is accomplished by the time-honoured tradition of shooting fuel tanks on the ground. If you hit a missile or a tank, the explosion results in debris, which may be as dangerous as a direct hit. In addition to the missiles and tanks, walls periodically stretch across the flying route with holes or gaps in them, which must be accurately negotiated.

CRITICISM

● '*Havoc* is, getting right to the point, a Zaxxon game. It's nowhere near as good as the real arcade game, but is probably the best Spectrum version yet — mind you, I can only think of one other version. *Havoc* has a 3D effect that is okay but hardly mega-brill, it also flickers quite a lot. Most of the hazards caught me out first time round but on later attempts it was easy to get ready for the holes in the walls etc. This game is just above average in my opinion. The sound is rather limp.'

● '*Havoc is quite a good 'rip off' of Zaxxon — the arcade mass success. This game does have the 3D angled view to it, but lacks something — maybe the graphic quality and content. While playing this game it became apparent that it lacked considerable content and play-*





ability. Graphics did provide quite a good illusion of movement but other than 'side' and 'forward' walls, there isn't much else apart from the odd blue line, drum and missile that scrolls in a straight line and at the same speed as the background. Your craft moves very responsively but not at a fast speed. It also has a fixed shadow which doesn't grow larger or smaller depending on your height. Sound is very poor with only the odd beep here and there. Colour — well with this type of game attribute problems can only be overcome by using two colours, and the end result — only two colours, unattractive and not very appealing. Not a very good buy to say the least, but the best of its type (in the sense of large graphics) at the moment.'



● 'This Zaxxon style shoot em up lacks excitement through poor graphics and uninteresting content. The enemy missiles sit like stodgy puddings on the ground, moving at the same speed as the scrolling background, which is to say they're not moving at all. And when you hit a target it doesn't disappear. True, there is some debris scattered around, but it's very unsatisfying that the targets are not destroyed properly, just showing an instant scattering of dots around an otherwise intact target seems rather cheap an effect. I didn't think much of it at all.'

COMMENT

Control keys: Q/A up/down, O/P left/right
Joystick: Kempston, AGF, Protek
Keyboard play: responsive enough, but sluggish movement overall
Use of colour: poor
Graphics: jerky scrolling, large but undetailed
Sound: poor
Skill levels: 1
Lives: 3
Screens: scrolling
General rating: somewhat unplayable due to lack of content, also has an unhelpful control selection menu without feedback. Generally below average.

Use of computer	**62%**
Graphics	**68%**
Playability	**62%**
Getting started	**48%**
Addictive qualities	**57%**
Value for money	**54%**
Overall	**59%**

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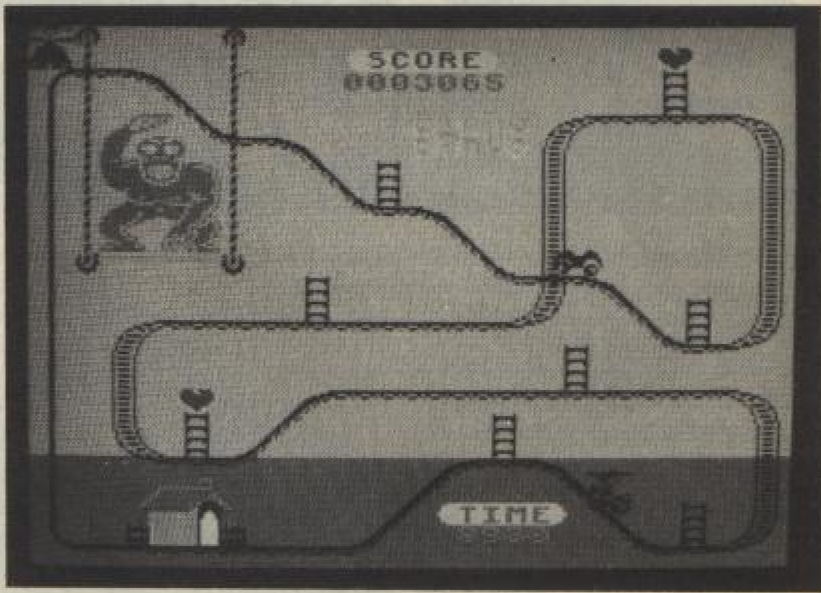
Reviews

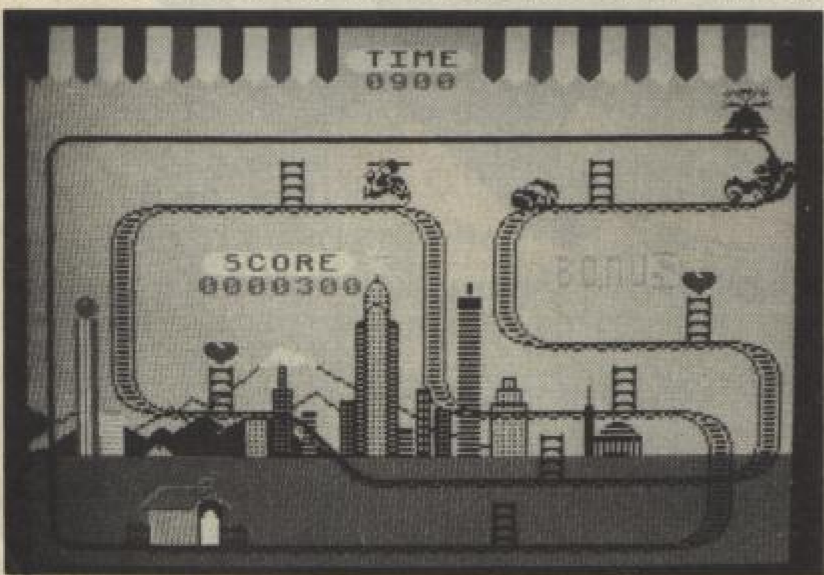
KONG STRIKES BACK

Producer: **Ocean**
Memory required: **48K**
Retail price: **£6.95**
Language: **machine code**
Author: **N. Alderton & J. M. Smith**

Ocean's original attempt at *Kong* brings back painful memories for some people. It wasn't really what you would call the definitive version. Some liked it a lot and others thought it was chronic. Well over the last year or so things have changed at Ocean and *Kong Strikes Back* isn't a rehash of *Kong* but an entirely original game. Oddly enough, Ocean's *Hunchback II* has more in common with the traditional 'Kong' format.

The idea of the game, however, hasn't changed and it is to rescue the damsel in distress. The damsel is distressed up at the top of a fairground roller coaster and you start at the bottom. The object is to climb to the top of the roller coaster ride by walking along the rails to achieve your goal but . . . well as per usual it's not that easy. Kong, from whom you are rescuing the damsel, sends roller coaster cars at you and if you are hit by one a life is lost. These can be avoided by climbing ladders or by destroying them with your limited stock of bombs. Upon reaching the top the time left is added to your score and then onto the next sheet, of which there are four of increasing complexity. Bonuses are received by collecting objects like hearts from the tops of some ladders. When you have finished the four sheets you start all over again but with some new nasties added to the scenario.





Another game from Ocean this month that features a screaming damson in distress— though this one's a bit of a scarecrow. This is the first screen from the game, and as you can see, it's nothing like the KONG we know.

CRITICISM

● 'I find it a bit confusing being a nameless blob. Nowhere in the cassette blurb does it give any identity to you or your damsel. The graphics are nice though not astounding. I particulary liked the New York backdrop in the first screen. There is one exception though, the girl you are trying to rescue. Boy is she UGLY! No offence intended (well only a little bit) but it has to be said she's an ugly little spritette. Movement is both fast and flicker free. The early screens are easy and the latter screens are hard. Surprising that. The whole program has a very professional feel to it and *Kong Strikes Back* owes a lot of its appeal to that. Addictive though not astounding seems a fair comment on *Kong Strikes Back.*'

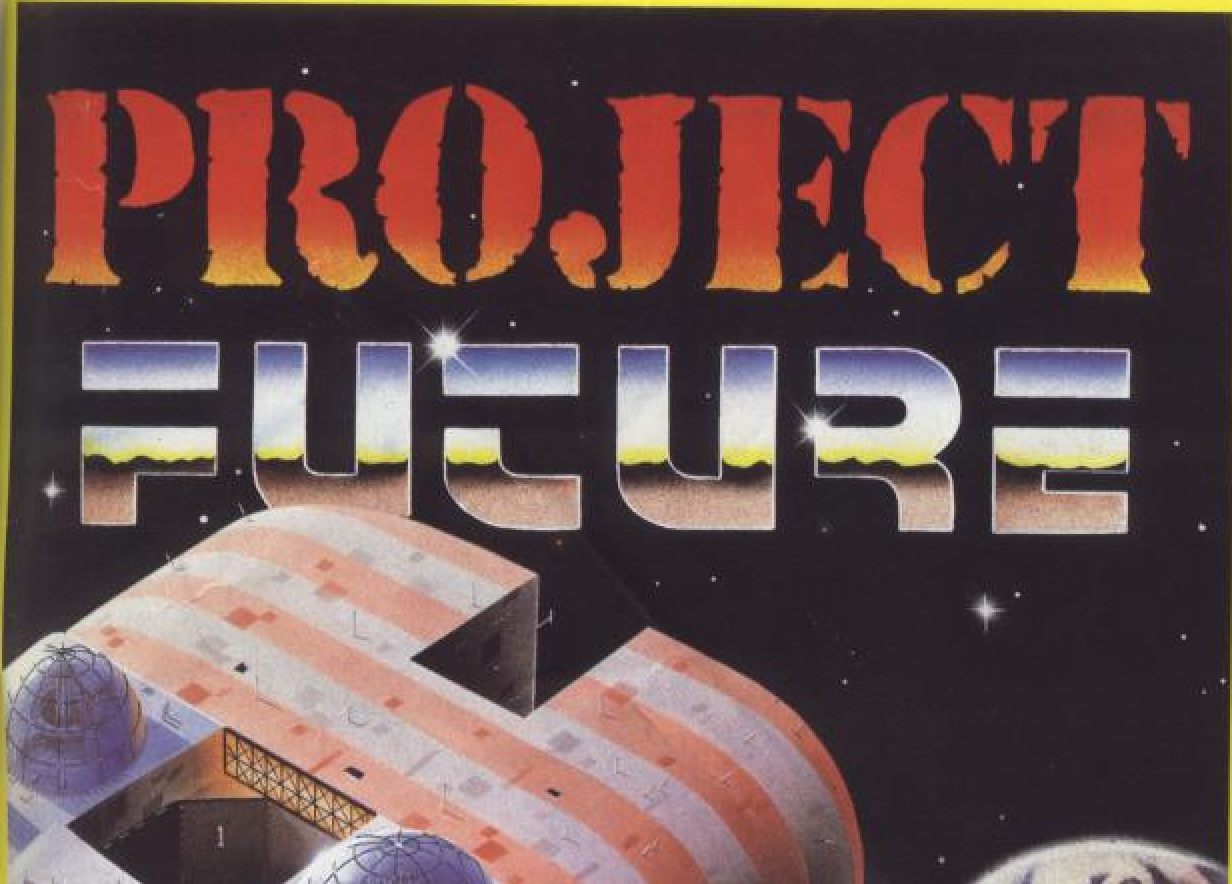
● *'At last it's here, after seeing the title I thought it might have something to do with the original* Kong *theme with platforms, barrels, fireballs and whatever, out to get you, but no, strangely enough, it is on a totally different theme, with no connection whatsoever, other than a Kong, who doesn't really have to be Kong, throwing roller coasters at you. On the roller coaster theme the rails or tracks for the roller coaster weave all over the screen creating intricate patterns. The roller coaster cars move very neatly along the rails. You also walk along the rails well, when there's a downward slope, you slide down them like on a helter skelter. Perhaps this will be the main attractive feature, the way that he does this. The game seems to lack something — it wasn't the graphics although they were quite plain, and nothing extraordinary, and the sound wasn't too bad, although not up to scratch compared to what they said in the press release with sythesised sound. At first it seemed too easy, but it soon became apparent that there was more to this game than just rescuing the girl. On the higher levels of play, more objects are included to delay and impeded your progression through the game. With a title such as* Kong Strikes Back *it will possibly encourage people to buy it because of the original Kong game, this is totally unfair, and misleading because it's nothing like the original. Overall I'm not very enthusiastic about this game, it's not up to Ocean's usual high standards, and definitely not worth waiting for.'*

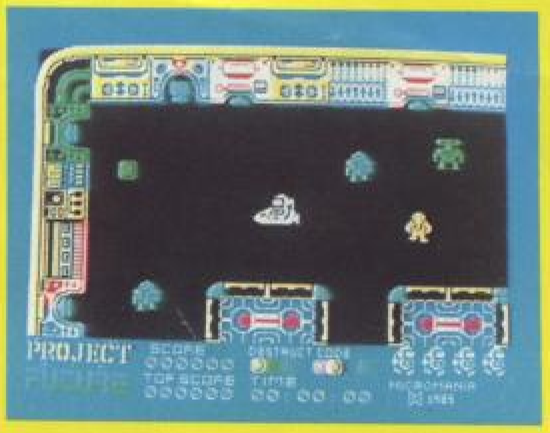
● 'It's perhaps a bit unfair to complain about the look of the graphics because when you actually look closely there are some nice little details, but oddly, overall they add up to a rather old fashioned look. The game itself is original in feeling and by no means easy. On the first screens there doesn't seem to be all that much to do really, but as you progress it does pick up to become a medium addictive game, although I feel the real long lasting appeal isn't there.'

COMMENTS

Control keys: user definable, four directions and fire needed
Joystick: almost any via UDK and provided options
Keyboard play: responsive, although a bit finicky on positioning for the ladders
Use of colour: average
Graphics: different! Reasonable size, although characters are not very well drawn
Sound: not much
Skill levels: 1 but progressive difficulty
Lives: 4 to start, but bonus lives add
Screens: 4
General rating: definitely above average, medium addictive, and reasonably playable.

Use of computer	**80%**
Graphics	**79%**
Playability	**77%**
Getting started	**81%**
Addictive qualities	**63%**
Value for money	**55%**
Overall	**73%**







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